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Shi'ism in transition

Abedi, Mehdi, Ph.D.

Rice University, 1988

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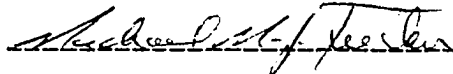
SHI'ISM IN TRANSITION

by

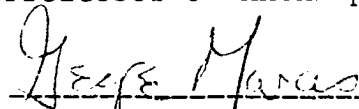
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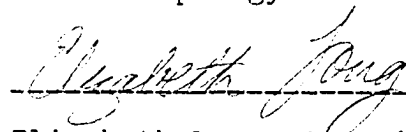
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ABSTRACT

SHI'ISM IN TRANSITION

by

MEHDI ABEDI

The importance of Islam as a religious, cultural, and political force has been too evident in the last decades of the twentieth century to need any emphasis. To reach an understanding of the position and influence of Islam in the world today, it is necessary not only to understand "classical" Islam, but to recognize that Islam is a transforming force. It is more than an old religion, it is a modern day ideology for "changing". At the same time it is, itself, a "changing" ideology. As it attempts to transform its own abode (as well as the entire world), it becomes transformed by the delimiting forces which surround it.

Currently Shi'ite Islam deserves particular attention. It is no longer a traditional/traditionalist force vis-a-vis secularist "social reform" confined in its abode (mainly Iran), but an expanding "revolutionary" force. It is revolutionary in its call to all Muslims of the world to "return": to "original Islam", to "self" (from cultural disalienation, dis-assimilation), and to the world which the "eroding acid of modernism/modernization" has severely

damaged but not totally destroyed.

This study draws attention, through a variety of interpretive techniques, to this complex change and transformation. Part 1 explores individual growth and education in Iran through a series of autobiographical sondages set in the postmodern world. Part 2 features the life and works of an important Shi'ite ideologue who reinterpreted his old faith into a practical ideology in light of modern thought. Part 3 interprets ethnographic observations among Muslim immigrants (and converts) in Houston, Texas. The study concludes by addressing the issue of minority adjustment in exile.

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I am grateful to Monica and Amir Fateh, whose financial support was instrumental in taking me back to school. Many people at Rice University have contributed to my intellectual growth: professors Stephen Tyler, George Marcus, Michael Fischer, J. M. Taylor and Linda Adair. I am deeply grateful to all of them. Barbara Podratz was always helpful when I needed her.

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Introduction: Progress and/or Authenticity
or
On Writing Anthropology in the Postmodern World

Ours is a world in flux. Such is the flux that in all the human sciences, terms such as "dialectic", "change", and "transformation" have become loaded concepts. At no other time in its rather short history has cultural anthropology's task been so challenging. Cultural anthropology perforce -- by virtue of its objects of attention, but also by virtue of the effects of its language of inscription -- must be something more than a descriptive science or a historiography of the present. Not only has it, for some time, been reflecting upon the validity of its hitherto accepted terminology, methods and theoretical frameworks, but it has also ambitiously moved beyond the confines of primitive societies into complex ones, where such terms carry unavoidable political inflections, and where the roles of anthropologist and native, writer and reader can easily be challenged, exchanged, collapsed into one or split into many.

In the chapters which follow, I have tried to conduct an experimental account of change or transformation, seen dialectically within the constancy of religious life of a

Muslim generation. Change and constancy are in tension in a particularly modern way. It is a changing situation because, thanks to modern means of international communication, the Muslim world has now for some time become fascinated with the notion of progress, a notion which has meant catching up to the achievements of the "Christian" West. It is a situation of constancy, however, because there has been almost equal stress in the Muslim world upon "self-preservation" and "return to self" -- progress and authenticity -- cultural alienation, and cultural dis-alienation.

The dialectic has, of course -- despite efforts at "authenticity" or cultural de-linkage from the alienations of modernity -- been weighted towards change and transformation. A schoolboy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, for instance, not only knows much more about the West than did his father at the same age, but he is more envious than were even those of his predecessors who managed to exit this rather violent dialectical tension by emigrating and entering a smoother and entirely different set of tensions abroad.

Only a few have managed to exit for good, but they are growing in number. In the past, migration was temporary; one left and returned as a holy messenger of change and return was a moral, patriotic duty. Remaining abroad was a crime

and a sin: a default on a moral debt. Moreover, exile meant loneliness, and a painful annihilation of self in a foreign culture. No longer is this the case: if one can no longer say Friday prayers in the grand mosque of Yazd in central Iran, still one can say them with one's "Muslim brothers and sisters" in one of the several mosques of Houston, Texas. Such prayers are equally valid. Exile no longer means loneliness and self-annihilation in a foreign culture; it means membership in a smaller community of the like-minded, self-integration within a nation which has the capacity of sustaining many diverse communities. Unlike the temporary exiles of the past generations, contemporary exiles are not messenger-trainees of change for their homelands; rather they are carriers of bits and pieces of their native culture within the comfort of a foreign nation.

Ours is a world in touch. Only a century ago, as strong a case of "occidentalism" about the West existed, as rich as Edward Said's "Orientalism" about the East. Thanks to the complex flux of our time, modern day migrations and communication systems, the world is now moving towards increasing cultural exchange, East and West are rapidly learning about each other. We read, listen to, and watch each other with hitherto unheard of interest. Let the curiosity of the reader of these chapters be witness.

Towards the end of the summer of 1974, in Lawrence,

Kansas, my Saudi Arabian roommate, Mansur, who had lived in the U.S. for many years, introduced me to a newcomer from Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Abd al-Aziz Musa. Muhammad, who had bought himself a Trans-Am as soon as he had arrived, spoke no more than a few English words. He was here on a government scholarship, and he wanted to become an engineer. Mansur had brought Muhammad to our apartment because the latter was badly missing his family and friends, and needed to talk to with somebody in his native tongue. Mansur, who claimed to know the streets of San Francisco better than those of Riyadh or Jedda, was very good at advising the newcomers. He knew how to have fun, and he did not take his studies seriously.

Muhammad and I exchanged greetings in Arabic, and he sat down very carefully on the chair, not to cause damage to his tight suit. "Ready for a wild party?" I asked him, with a degree of sarcasm. "If Allah wills," he answered with an ambiguous smile. It was as if he realized his own contradiction as he uttered his insha Allah. He seemed somewhat embarrassed. We all laughed. He began to ask me where I was from.

Mansur interjected jokingly in Arabic, as he made himself his favorite drink, scotch and soda: "Watch out for this Shi'i (Shi'ite)". We all laughed, but Muhammad's laughter quickly turned serious: "Then, you are not a

Muslim?" I mischievously and sarcastically answered, "No, just a Shi'i!" Mansur and I laughed again, but Muhammad did not. I asked him whether he knew much about Shi'ism, wanting to reassure him that Shi'ism was a major sect of Islam just as Sunnism was, and that we were Muslim brothers. Muhammad told me that he had read about the Shi'i, that most of them lived in Russia. Mansur and I laughed again, and I thought he was pulling my leg, until, as he began to relate what he knew about these people, we realized that he had confused Shi'i and Shuyu'i (communism). He thought I was a communist. Apologizing to me, Mansur told him, "We call them Rafidi, a name they do not like; they prefer to be called Shi'i". Muhammad indicated that he had now realized his mistake. He turned to me and said, "You are from the party of Ali ibn Abi-Talib." I replied: "We are all Muslims." Mansur interrupted with his usual, "Don't get smart with us."

Mansur sat down with his drink. Unlike Muhammad, he was somewhat knowledgeable about the history of Islam, although he cared less about religion in general or Islam in particular. In fact, he was dating a Jewish girl, Gwen, who at my mischievous instigation had bought him a gold star of David for his birthday. (Mansur showed the gold necklace to his friends to get a laugh, but he never wore it.) I thought the religious debate was over, but it had only begun.

Mansur began the discussion with the sudden death of the Prophet of Islam and the leadership crisis it had caused. "Shi'ites," he said, "are the followers of those who allegedly refused to go along with the general consensus: they believe that Ali ibn Abi-Talib, rather than Abu-Bakr, should have become the first caliph." He tried to phrase his account in conciliatory terms, to avoid my objections.

"I know all this," Muhammad said, "but our shaykh told us that the Rafidi religion was invented by a Jew." We both helped him recall the name: Abdullah ibn Saba. I added immediately that "Abdullah ibn Saba" was a mythic figure, that he never really existed. Mansur kept quiet as Muhammad bragged about the accuracy of the al-kutub was al-tawarikh (books and histories). Our debate about Abdullah was leading nowhere. Muhammad who was getting tired of objecting to my statements, finally asked: "Is it not true that you believe that [the archangel] Gabriel was supposed to take the revelation to Ali, but by mistake he gave it to Muhammad?" I had heard the accusation before, and I tried to deflate the seriousness of the debate by teasing him once again: "No, we believe that Muhammad is a simple prophet, but Ali is God." We all laughed, but Muhammad's laughter was somewhat bitter.

"If you let this Ajami (non-Arab) Shi'i practice his Arabic with you," Mansur told Muhammad, "you will never

learn English. In a few months you will realize that none of these issues are very important. It is important, however, that all of us get a degree from the university, and meanwhile that we have as much fun as possible."

Nothing preoccupied Muhammad as much as banat (girls). He had bought his Trans-Am because he had heard that girls loved such cars. Within a few weeks he had not only learned the names of all mixed drinks and obtained memberships in a dozen night clubs, but he also had stopped saying his daily prayers. He learned his "when in Rome do as the Romans do" as quickly as anybody else.

Whenever I saw him, I was reminded of his idiotic philological conflation of Shi'i and Shuyu'i, which, in an odd sort of way, I found both amusing and flattering. I was a distant disciple of Dr. Ali Shariati, who, albeit on a different basis, had argued that "genuine Shi'ism" was a kind of economic "Shyu'iyah". Like the rest of his disciples, I considered Shariati, a critic of classical Marxism, to be a "God-worshipping socialist", who in his version of Islam had put all living ideologies to shame. His Islam, we were convinced, had all the good features of other political ideologies, without their defects. To us, "communist" was not an insult, but a positive label towards progress.

Almost all of Shariati's followers were high school and

university students. While his books were banned in Iran, they were widely disseminated abroad, thanks mainly to the "Liberation Movement of Iran" led by Mehdi Bazargan and Sayyid Mahmud Taleqani. The Muslim Students Association (Persian-Speaking Group) of Europe and North America was then composed mainly of those who, at least for political reasons, gave lip service to Shariati and his theological socialism. Shariati was the ideologue. Khomeini's name had just begun to be associated with the title "Imam". As some put it, Shariati was the "message", Khomeini was the "blood". I was one of many young Iranians attracted back to Islam by Shariati's books. In those days none of us realized the great ideological differences between Khomeini and Shariati. Each was silent about the other. And we not only interpreted their "mutual silence" as "mutual consensus", but we read the thoughts of each side into the writings of the other.

Shariati had taught us a Shi'ism which was drastically different from traditional Shi'ism of the ulama and the masses: his was not a religion, but an ideology, aimed at refining the cultural resources of the past as slogans for the present and future. He believed in purifying Islam of superstition, reactionary elements, and whatever was harmful to the prestige of his version of Islam. He taught us to laugh not only at the misperceptions held by Sunni Muslims

about Shi'ism, but also at traditional Shi'ism. He was the champion of the middle way, an eclectic ideology enunciated in the language of Islam, distinguished from the qishri mollas and ignorant Muslims.

Thanks to Sharaiti, not only could I laugh at what Muhammad Musa had been taught about Shi'ites in Sunni Saudi Arabia, but I compared what he had been taught with what the mullahs taught kids in Shi'ite Iran. Our situation in Iran, however, was slowly moving toward a sort of pan-Islamism. Beginning with the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 and the defeat of the Muslim Arabs, a number of "enlightened" (roshan-fekr) religious preachers had revived the earlier Dar al-Taqrīb ("Realm of Approximation") view which had called for mutual recognition of Sunni and Shi'ite versions of Islam. While the derogatory term *sag sunni* (Sunni dog) was what my generation (and many generations before) had learned in their childhood, the honorary title "Sunni brother" was slowly taking its place. While on the basis of the principle of *taqiya* (dissimulation, mental reservation), we had been permitted by some of our "progressive" theologians to say our daily prayers behind a Sunni imam for the sake of the unity of the Islamic *ummah* (community), it was (and still is) too difficult for our Sunni brothers to treat us as more than political brothers. Religious belief is not a matter of serious and sincere compromise. In fact,

because the Sunni-Shi'ite disputes are so deeply rooted in dogma, none of those who have seriously argued for the unity of the Islamic ummah have ever been able to come up with a formula which could one day unite Shi'ites and Sunnis under more than a transitory and temporary banner. While it is true that the common slogan has been "one Qur'an, one qiblah," etc., the issue of real common interest has hardly ever differed from that of common enemy, be it colonialism, Zionism, or something else.

Nonetheless, at least for many of those Muslims who open-mindedly read new books, much of the mutual misunderstandings between the Sunnis and Shi'ites have been removed. No learned Shi'ite any longer argues, for instance, that Umar, one of the four respected Sunni caliphs, was an illegitimate child. Nor are all the contemporary Sunni youth like Muhammad al-Musa. In the process of taqrib (approximation, getting closer), the Shi'ite and Sunni scholars have removed many of the misconceptions, and have learned more genuinely about their great differences. Neither side can easily change the other. The number of conversions from Sunni to Shi'ite, or vice-versa, is much smaller than the number of non-Muslims who convert to either sect.

In the melting pot of America, or any other liberal democratic society, "minority religion" is more of an

identity than a belief system. Muslims are no exception. Only a few manage to remain untouched by liberal democratic values which, unlike religious values, call for religious tolerance. Only a small number can return to their homelands truly claiming to have preserved all their religious beliefs and norms. A larger number learn "the American way": they preserve their religious identity while they more or less lose important portions of their old beliefs.

Not only religious belief, but also religious identity calls for traditions and rituals. It is almost impossible, and quite painful, for a religious mind to become entirely secular and atheistic. My personal experience has taught me that the residue of religious thought remains in the corners of one's mind, no matter how strongly one claims to be non-religious.

Once an Iranian friend was giving me a ride home. On the way he was trying to persuade me that God did not exist and that religion was only superstition. All of a sudden a small child ran into the street. He stepped on the brake, but I thought we would hit the child. Fortunately, the child lost its balance and sat down on its rear. The car passed by without hitting him. My friend, now trembling with fear, immediately asked me whether I knew a place where he could sacrifice a lamb, a replacement of the blood which,

fortunately, had not been shed. He tried to persuade me that although it sounded superstitious, he really needed to sacrifice the lamb.

"We become religious three times in our lives," an Iranian once told me, "when our wives are giving birth, when we get married, and when someone in our family dies." Although many manage to remain practicing Muslims in America, unlike back home where religious know-how is commonplace, in America the observer is witness to the clumsiness with which ritual matters are handled.

Birth

"God has just given me a beautify girl," says Kamvar to me on the phone, "and I wonder whether we Muslims have something similar to baptism. Is there a required ritual bath for the new-born?" "Not for the child, but for her mother," I say. I tell him that in Iran, women of the neighborhood get together and take the new mother to the public bath house where she takes a ritual bath or shower. Here, I tell him, she can perform it by herself at home. It is similar to other kinds of ritual bath. For the baby, however, there is no required ritual, but it is highly recommended that one whisper an adhan and iqamah (prayer call) in her ears.

Mr. Kazemayni's wife gives birth to a male child. He knows it is highly recommended to whisper the adhan into the

infant's ears (he may even think it is required). He calls me to do it, but I am not at home, so he calls Ayatollah Rashed in Yazd (Iran) in a hurry to ask him to utter the sacred words into the infant's right ear over the phone. He did not want to call the Islamic Society of Greater Houston "because they are Sunni".

Marriage

Mr. and Mrs. Khazeni have lived in Houston for thirty-five years. The husband is an oil engineer, the wife a housewife. "We came here about the time Mosaddeq's trouble began," Mr. Khazeni tells me, "and we have never felt sorry that we moved here for good. Iran has been for some time, all will for the foreseeable future remain, a land of trouble, all because of oil. There will be trouble as long as there is oil." Their daughter and an American boy want to get married. Mr. Khazeni does not mind "as long as the two live happily ever after and raise good children". Mrs. Khazeni, however, is disturbed. Islam does not allow the marriage of a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman. Mrs. Khazeni agrees with her daughter that "Paul is a wonderful person from a good family, with a good education and job." Actually, she is less disturbed about the marriage than about the fact that they will have illegitimate children.

Mrs. Khazeni calls me. "Ask him to convert," I say. She replies she does not know how to ask him: "What if he

gets mad and leaves my daughter? What, if they go to a Christian church and get married without me and her father present? She has threatened if I show my fanatical side to him, he will lose respect for me and ask why I have not expressed my religious concerns during the past several years. They have already talked about marrying in civil court. I am just afraid." I tell her there are good ways in which one can tell him. "I leave everything to you, " she says. I ask her to give my phone number to her daughter.

The next day, the daughter calls and I arrange to meet the young couple. I begin talking about my profession, anthropology, and say that every culture has rites of passage. Then I speak of the psychological changes one experiences over time and changed circumstances. "For instance," I say, "you two have been brought up in a secular society with liberal democratic values. Perhaps, you care less about religion, like the majority. But there is no guarantee that you will remain the same all your lives. Maybe at some point you will join a church. There is nothing wrong with doing what pleases your spirit. Certainly we do not blame old folks for going to church and reading the Bible. Often people get more religious with age." So far they agreed. In fact they listened with eagerness. "Now," I said, "it is your marriage and you

should do as you please. But Mr. and Mrs. Khazeni, who hopefully soon will be grandparents to your children, have raised only one daughter, and she is dear to their hearts. They both have roots in an different culture, one that values tradition a great deal. I am sure it would please them very much if you were to marry according to their tradition."

At this point, Paul made me fell that all my talk had been unnecessary: "I would like that very much, but we do not know where to find a Muslim clergyman. I know I must accept Islam. I was raised a Catholic, but I have no religion at the moment." They look at each other and smile. I ask whether I might have the honor of performing their marriage. They agree. I close the discussion, saying, "And by the way, as your clergyman, I expect you to raise your children with the good things of both traditions." The marriage is held at the bride's home and all goes well.

Divorce

It is 2:30 a.m. The telephones wakes me. "It must be from Iran," I think. But it is not. A trembling female voice asks if she could talk to Mr. Abedi.

-- "Speaking."

-- "I mean that Mr. Abedi who knows the marriage and divorce laws."

-- "Speaking."

-- "Yes, my husband divorced me a year ago in court, and married another woman. A few days later a Sunni Muslim divorced us in the mosque too. Am I considered divorced now according to the law of Islam?

-- "Yes you are, but did you really have to call me at this time of night to ask me this question? Couldn't you wait until tomorrow morning when I am not half asleep?"

-- "I'm sorry for having awakened you. But I need to know this right now. I have another question: what is the formula for temporary marriage?"

-- "Please! Regardless of whether you are a friend or an enemy, stop pulling my leg at this time of night. Is this a practical joke, or what?"

-- "I am sorry, it is not a joke. You do not know me either. I need to know the formula right now. (A long pause.) Otherwise I will perhaps be forced into committing a sin, and your God will punish you for not teaching me the formula."

I could hear their unusual and anxious heavy breathing, perhaps her heartbeat too. I realized her situation, probably she was with a man and she did not wish it to be adultery or fornication. I taught her how to recite the formula and have some legitimate fun.

Death

I receive a call from Mr. Medqalchi's family that I

should visit him in the hospital. My busy schedule does not allow me the time, and after all he is not a close friend. I have met him three or four times over the past few years. Two of these times were when his daughters were getting married and my services were needed. A few days later, I receive another call: "Daddy is expecting you in the hospital every minute; we are not sure if he is going to make it." I cancel an appointment and go to his bedside. Originally from the Turkish-speaking city of Tabriz, he used to be a well-to-do businessman in the Tehran bazaar. He and his wife came to the States at the time of the Revolution to visit their daughters. The family urged him to stay, telling him that the wealthy were in danger, and he should wait until the turmoil is over and Khomeini is overthrown. The longer he stayed in America, the more scared he became to return, and the more he lost hope. He was used to being busy, and looked for something to do, but since he did not speak English, there was little he could do. For a while he was a ticket-taker at a cinema. Then he opened a pizza place with another Iranian. They went bankrupt. He tried his hand at poetry (a poor poet), and tried to pour out his heart about his fate and that of his country; he looked for a publisher. Eventually it was found he had cancer.

When I arrive at his bedside, his younger daughter is there. He manages to sit up, with a Persian verse from the

Azarbaijani poet, Shariyar, on his lips: "You finally came, but it is too late." I answer with an English verse from Shakespeare: "Better late than never." He tries to understand its meaning, repeating it with my help. He tries to make a verse, but cannot: "Alas, alas, I . . ." He asks his daughter to leave us alone for a few minutes. A nurse checks his pulse and blood pressure. Another nurse brings a cup of ice cream, which he slowly eats with appetite. His face is covered with sweat, he has an oxygen tub connected to his nose. The TV is on, but he does not watch the old movie with scenes from a thousand and one nights tale. I try to cheer him up with a funny comment about the belly dancer now on the screen. He recites a verse from the Qur'an: "Those to whom We give long life, We break them down." It is the first time I have heard something religious from his mouth. I try to convince him that the verse is not about strong Turks like himself who never are broken, that I can see him getting out of the bed, drinking whisky and dancing with his love for hours and hours."

As though he had not heard a word, he asks me whether we are friends. I say yes. "Good friends?" "Very good friends." "I don't think . . . I have been . . . a good . . . friend . . . to you. I hope . . . you will be . . . a good friend to me." With these broken sentences, he tries to tell me that living and dying in exile are both

difficult, and that he wishes Iranians would unite behind the young shah and get rid of Khomeini. Then he attempts the verse again, "Alas, alas . . .", and returns to the theme of death: "Promise to take good care of me and bury me in a Muslim cemetery." I reply: "No one knows who will die first: if I die before you, it will be your duty, if you die before me, God forbid, I will have the duty." "That is all I need you for today. Don't tell anyone now."

We shook hands but it was not enough for him. I hugged him for a few seconds. I did not believe he was about to die. His funeral, the first I ever supervised in my life, took place in the afternoon of the following day. "He is fortunate to be buried among the graves of Iranians who passed away before him; he is not alone," was someone's clumsy consolation to Mrs. Medqalchi.

How should I, an Iranian in exile, and an anthropologist, write? I experiment in three registers: (1) life history as a "cross-section" of a generational experience, my own, with elicitation help from an American friend-colleague-teacher to register authentic voice/experience, yet within sociological frames of life-cycle, class, and pre-revolutionary society; (2) analytic biography of the central ideological teacher of my generation, Dr. Ali Shariati, to clarify his role not only as harbinger of the Revolution, but even more importantly

his place in the cultural hermeneutics or semantics of modern Iran caught between progress and authenticity, alienation and attempts at dis-alienation; and (3) ethnography of a community in exile, focussing here on Ramadhan in Houston 1984. Each is but a fragment of larger works in process, fragments of lives in change, fragments exploring how to constitute an anthropology of the postmodern world in which Iranians are central actors, not only as keepers of oil.

Chapter 1

Shi'ite Socialization in Pahlavi Iran

Autobiographical Sondages of a Postmodern World

Introduction

The following autobiographical essay is experimental in several senses. Life histories are often used to chart the characteristic formative experiences of persons in particular cultures, either to focus on stages of the life cycle with its typical phases and events, or to document the cultural construction of personhood and the quality of experience in a culture through the deeply probed life of a particular individual, or thirdly to provide a narrative device for exploring how historical changes in the socio-political or political economic structure work themselves out in experiential terms. Normally, life histories are constructed by an investigator out of interview, documentary, and commentary materials; and recently there has been a growing sophistication in cross-cultural contexts of the degree to which native idioms, concepts, genres of discourse are incorporated, as well as of the degree to which attention is paid to the assumptions of the investigator's own culture in the composition of the final written life history. Autobiographies constitute a sub-class of life histories:

usually they are written to pass on to the next generation memories of the past. Some are didactic, carefully structured as moral exemplars for the next generation; others are more like a Bildungsroman, meant for self-clarification of the ways in which moral consciousness evolves both through personal growth and through changes in historical circumstances; others, of course, are primarily chronological efforts to define a sense of identity and place in the world. For readers, autobiographies are often rich historical documents of times past, providing not merely personalized accounts of how events were effected by individuals, but at their best insight into how people thought and felt. In contemporary autobiographies, readers increasingly desire a rich account of interiority.

The autobiography that follows is somewhat unique and experimental in several ways, although it attempts to perform several of the functions listed above. First of all, it is an account of a life of unusual range: a childhood in an Iranian village, where literacy was restricted and folklorically elaborated religiosity was not; a youth in a provincial city known both for its industriousness (Iran's second most important textile center, with industrial mills as well as traditional looms) and for its conservative religiosity, one of those crucibles of conflict between ideologies of modernization and defense

of Islam that would generate the Islamic Revolution of 1979; a somewhat postponed final high school year in Tehran amidst the debates of marxists and islamicists; a college education in Kansas and a graduate work in Houston amidst the worlds of exiles and Americans. It is a Bildungsroman, if one likes, of transition from a fundamentalist to a cosmopolitan consciousness, by an individual whose experiential strata cross class as well as cultural boundaries and who thereby has access to multiple worlds of interpretive nuance, and who therefore has been able to serve exiles of various sorts in their dilemmas of readjustment. Second, it is written as an ethnographic document of worlds that are barely, if at all, accessible in books. Indeed as the folklorist, historian, and librarian, Iraj Afshar, one day in Yazd, jokingly but quite seriously commented to the American geography graduate student, Michael Bonine, for whom Abedi was translating a local history: the real book is to be found in such bright young boys, not in texts. For that world was -- and to a large extent remains -- an oral life world. It is thus experimental in trying to combine into a meaningful mosaic, in one volume, autobiographical recall, scholarly exposition, and dialogic participant observation. Thirdly, insofar as this chapter and the volume as a whole may become part of Iranian scholarship, autobiography is itself a relatively novel genre. Writing life histories,

traditionally, has been both rare and didactic, apart from the restricted entries of the rijal literature (noting birthplace, parentage, teachers, and perhaps scholarly trips in search of manuscripts) used as part of the critical apparatus in knowing what sources in the hadith literature to trust. Inevitably this chapter is not as rich as it could be, for posed as setting there are no clear bounds: it could be expanded to incorporate all of the-

Abedi's knowledge, including (importantly) the contexts in which materials from books are received by their readerships. For the moment, however, the task is to provide one life as an "archeological" sondage, back into the strata of the life-worlds of provincial Iran of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. The bracketted annotation is meant to highlight analytic themes, especially those which will be taken up in subsequent chapters. The intent of this chapter is to set up resonances from the lived-in-world of contemporary experience to bring to life the worlds of scholarship familiar from texts.

Scenes of a Village Childhood

[Villages are all-too-often thought of as communal pieces of time-immemorial. Villages on the Iranian plateau, however, all have histories, often traceable in the histories of the digging of irrigation systems by governors, merchants, and others. There is movement, historically, in and out of villages, bad times and good. Hill villages often serve as summer retreats for the better off urban folk; and cities as places to make money for villagers who come and go. Up-stream (or top of the irrigation system) is where the better-off folk live.

In the oral life-world, information is marked by questions of reliability. There is a rhythm of attribution to witnesses. Documents are often suspect as eminently forgeable and alterable, and so themselves are witnessed with seals around their margins. (These issues will be taken up in Chapter II.) Experience, on the other hand, tends to be shared knowledge encapsulated in stories that everyone can recognize. The situation is the reverse of the world of declining shared experience where novels and autobiographies attempt to rebuild experience as information, and where information is replicable. The following autobiography stands in between the two worlds.

Villages, interestingly, have a way of etching characters. Experience may be shared, knowledge may be

limited, but role and personality take on a heightened salience, and become part of a familial homespun commentary and anecdotal philosophy. Such familial language is a basic stratum in Iranian contemporary existence, providing a backdrop and warming contrast to more sophisticated stata of bureaucratic, professional, or mercantile life. Such richness of familial language provides a basis for much literature and film, a characteristic of the phase before cosmopolitan modernism and postmodernism take hold: modernism in this sense (say, Ibsen, Becket, or Ionesco) is eminantly translatable (who would read Norwegian or Gaelic or Romanian seemed to be the question); while postmodernism in this sense (say Joyce, Pynchon, or Rushdie) is intercultural (encompassing multiple languages and perspectives). The familial richness of the early modernizing phase registered in idiom and nuances of language leads to the despair of members of such cultures that their literature and life worlds are not really translatable. But see for instance the accounts of the Iranian films *Agha-ye Holu*, *Dorosky-chi*, and *Gav in Fischer* 1984.]

Place and Character: The Folkloric Life World

Dareh ("valley") is the name of the little village in which I was born. In the legal documents it is called Dareh-i Miyankuh (the Dareh of the Middle Mountains). It

is a poor hill village in a narrow valley of the middle ranges of the Shirkuh mountains, above the basin plain on which sit the larger villages Mehriz and Manshad, to the south of the city of Yazd in central Iran. Not even many Yazdis have heard of it: from Yazd you take the road to Kirman as far as the Abdul Malik Coffee House, then turn right onto a gravel road, past Mehriz, towards the mountains, and when you come to a branch in the road, you can see the bottom of the village. Villagers distinguish three neighborhoods or mahalleh: upper, lower, and middle. We lived in the middle.

The people of the village tell stories about the good past, the days when water was plenty, much wheat and barley was produced, melons were grown, and everyone was happy. By the time I was old enough to know the village, it was extremely poor, and more than a third of its population had left to work in Yazd or Tehran. Its primary produce was dried mulberries. My memories are of famine conditions of the post-war and post-Mossadeqh period, when children were told to fill their bellies by foraging for berries (angur-i kuhi, and parirok). American wheat was sent, but it was often spoiled and uncleaned.

Among the spiritual or religious features of the village were, beginning at the bottom of the village: the husainiyeh (arena for the passion plays on Ashura), the

graveyard and a hyena's grave for curing sick animals, a mosque and public bath house, and on the hillside behind the bath house a rock formation that was said to be an imprint of the sword of Imam Ali. In the middle neighborhood, there was a somewhat holy tree, in our yard. In the upper village there was a second mosque and a older holy tree. Above the village was a cave where the Imams were said to have left their footprints (Qadamgah) and a mountain ridge in the shape of a camel led by a man and pushed by another. All these sites were visual reminders of moral lessons. The camel shape of the mountain went with the legend that during a time of drought and famine, two villagers decided to declare war on God, and so they set out with their camels to reach the highest point so they could talk to God. God turned them to stone, and so they remain as a constant warning to people against blasphemy; big brother brooks no revolt. Similarly the sword of Ali was a warning against those who express animosity towards the first Imam: the story was that an enemy had tried to ambush Ali; Ali drew his sword, it hit the moutain, Ali killed the enemy, and the print of the sword remains on the mountain as a warning sign to all enemies. People often kissed the sword, as they did a nearby "camel footprint" which was said to be of the camel of the fourth Imam. The hyena grave (gabr kaftar) was at the desert's edge was used for animals as saints' tombs

(imamzadehs) were for humans: when animals fell sick they were circumambulated seven times around this grave, sacrifices, offerings, and vows were made.

The bath house, was used both for cleanliness and ritual purity: menfolk used it before dawn, womenfolk afterwards. Menfolk were less concerned with bathing, and more that they be ritually pure before going off to the fields. Womenfolk enjoyed spending time in the bath house socializing and picnicking. But the bath house was also associated with jinn, perhaps through an association with moisture, and so one was never supposed to go there alone. Jinn were said to attack neither those who were totally fearless nor those who were extremely timorous, but only the majority in between. They did not attack the timorous lest they have heart attacks and die; all jinn in this village were Muslims and did not want to have the blood of anyone charged to them; and they feared the totally fearless lest they be seized and have their necks wrung. There was a woman, Zan-i Hajji Dahkak (Wife of Hajji the Cloth Finisher), who lived between the husainiyeh and the mosque who was possessed by jinn and who served as an example to all of what might happen if you failed to exercise caution (parhiz). She was constantly talking to the jinn, screaming at them, cursing them, calling on Hazrat-i Abbas to get them to leave her alone. Her sons had to lock her in when they

left for the fields. She must have done something to a jinn. And so she was a living reminder that whenever you pushed a stone down a hillside, as kids loved to do, or whenever you threw out hot water, or even whenever you stepped somewhere, you should first call out to warn any invisible jinn in the way: bismillah-i rahman-i rahim, or parhiz o bismillah-i rahman-i rahim, or just parhiz ("beware"). If you did get tormented by a jinn, a jinn-gir (jinn catcher) would come to divine its name.

The holy tree in our yard had a story that I helped produce. People believed that trees have senses and understanding, especially such that one could talk to them. So if a fruit tree stopped bearing, if one had tried fertilizers and transplanting and nothing else seemed to work, one might try a ritual called bebur' navur ("cut, don't cut"). One placed a saw at its base, and one person pretended to begin cutting it down. A second person would then plead for the tree: what are you doing, don't you realize this is an apple tree? First person: you mean it looks like an apple? No, it gives apples (thus suggesting to the tree its duties). First person: why then does it not give apples, looks like a simple plane tree to me. Second person: please, I beg you, give it one more year, and I guarantee it will bring forth fruit. We had a tall apple tree in our yard that gave pleasant shade but no fruit. My

brother was working in Tehran and had promised to bring us some special black cherry seedlings.

My father decided to cut down the apple tree to make room for the new seedlings, but for some reason I jumped at him and began a kind of bebur navur dialogue with him, and Amu Ali, the village mo'azzen (caller to prayer) joined me. My father relented. Sometime later I happened to kill a snake in the mountain, and I buried it at the base of the tree because snakes were thought to be excellent fertilizer; and I would whisper to it: please I want to be proud of you, do your duty and bear fruit. Miraculously, the next year the tree produced an overabundance of apples, but in the following winter, as if exhausted by its effort, it died, and did not sprout again in the spring.

Near the mosque in the upper neighborhood there was an ancient plane tree that was even more venerable. Someone on an Ashura day had said he had seen it bleeding in sympathy with the martyrdom of Husain. And so people believed that if one attempted to cut its branches, especially on Ashura, something terrible would befall you.

Such folklore provides the weft in the rich anecdotal tapestry of the village's sense of itself: both its sense of place and its social composition through the lives of its highly individualistic characters. It is a humane tapestry viewed with much humor, as well as suspended judgment: only

God knows what is possible; and in a materially hard world, folkloric elaboration provides humane comfort and endless material for storytelling sociability. A few characters may serve to illustrate.

At the top of the upper village lived a wealthy Hajji and usurer (nozulkhor), who had connections with both the police and the clergy. (Ayatullah Saduqi of Yazd used to stay at his house.) One day a truck delivered a bag of melons for him; the driver called out to Hajji that he was dropping off the purchase, and left. I and some other boys stole the largest melon on top. When Hajji discovered his loss, he cursed us and our fathers at the top of his lungs. We waited until very late to return home, hoping our parents would be too tired to beat us. They weren't. We were beaten soundly enough so that our cries wafted through the village to Hajji. The next day we planned revenge on Hajji. We decided to stone his windows. Hajji's house was the only one to have glass windows. We did not realize that when the lights were on he could not see out, so we waited until he turned out the lights before throwing stones. When the lights came on we stopped. Hajji's house was the highest up the mountain slope, so we simply climbed above it to throw stones. Hajji could not figure out what was going on: somehow he did not think it was us. Instead he yelled at his two wives that one of them had thrown hot water

carelessly on the heads of the jinn, and he read out the prayer against the jinn. He then called a diviner. We were afraid the diviner would discover us, and I was very close to confessing to my mother, but fortunately I held back, figuring there would be time if he actually knew. The diviner, however, concluded it must indeed be the jinn, and that the house was haunted. As a result, Hajji sold his house and moved to town. It was not until years later that I told my father what had happened, and was surprised to learn that none of the boys had told their parents.

Among the other characters of the village, there was first Hasan Kadkhoda, the headman, with his pipe and handmade tobacco pouch. He, I was told, used to be the servant to the previous kadkhoda, Haj Mirza Agha. By comparison, it was always pointed out, he was a "nobody". Haj Mirza Agha had had fourteen wives and many sons. Being a large land owner, he needed cheap labor. Instead of hiring labor, he married many women, mostly widows, who were happy to be assured daily bread. Hasan Kadkhoda only had one wife, and she had only one eye. She was a bitch, and we children were terrified of her loud mouth.

Then there was Rudabeh, the midwife. She was about seventy, and lived with an unmarried daughter who had been blinded by small pox in childhood. Rudabeh was the female healer of the village, curing with herbs. She also baked

the most delicious bread. She had a saintly reputation for her piety, her healing, her religious knowledge, and for helping bring so many babies into the world. She herself was also the mother of several men of solid reputation.

There was also Maryam, the female washer of the dead. She was even older than Rudabeh. Most children feared her due to her occupation, but I was used to her since she visited our house frequently. My mother liked her, and my father would tease her by asking her to be his concubine. She was always murmuring prayers, and there were stories about the times God had answered her prayers immediately. Before falling asleep at night, I was told, she repeated the principles of her religion (usul-i din) and the names of the Imams, so that should she die while asleep the answers for the questions of the angels of death would be ready. Whenever there was a drought, people would ask her to pray for rain. I once asked how she did it, and my father suggested that we kids go with her up the mountain to the cave where the Imams had left their footprints. So one day, two of my sisters and I went with her. This pilgrimage was my first "long trip". Since it was the middle of summer, I knew that Maryam could not ask for rain: there are proper times for asking things of God. But at the cave Maryam began to shout and cry. As her voice echoed in the mountains, I experienced a mixture of fear, excitement, joy

and awe. We then entered the cave: there was a puddle of water and some birds flying about. Maryam said the birds were messengers of God. We sat down for a meal, and departed before sunset. My father admired Maryam and would say she was worth more than several men. He would frequently tell the story of the year Muharram fell in wintertime and he tried to cancel the annual passion play, which he supervised, because of the snow. Maryam objected, saying snow was a blessing, and if we abandoned the religious activities of Muharram, next year there would be no snow, and hence also no water in the spring for irrigation. She took a shovel in hand and shamed the menfolk into helping her clear the village for one of the best Muharram taziyehe (mourning rites) ever held.

Ali "Dallak", the barber, shaved the men, pulled bad teeth with his pliers, and ran the village bathhouse. During his military service he had learned to read and write, and so was something of a religious authority. He circumcised all my age mates. I was circumcised when I was two. I remember he came to me, calling me amu (reciprocal for paternal uncle-nephew), come here, let me see your little dodo and how it has grown. Then snip with a razor. I was so scared I pissed on him. I was then handed over to a woman. My mother was not there, but my father was. There

Children were not supposed to know about sex. The foreskin is supposed to go to an unmarried woman, who chops it up in a mortar and pestle and eats it to help her catch a husband.

And of course there was my father, who always bragged about his calligraphy, his ability to understand religious issues, and his ability to cure illnesses with talismans. If a girl could not find a husband, if a woman's husband no longer liked her and wanted another wife, for any ill, my father had the book of talismans and prayers. He was the male healer for the village, combining herbs, powders, liquids, and tablets, as well as talismans and prayers. For curing, in most cases, he did not charge. He had a shop in which he also sharpened knives, sickles, and saws, repaired broken china and stone cooking pots. For this he was paid by the villagers in kind: eggs, yoghurt, dried nuts, and other agricultural products. Even peddlers from outside the village often took payment for their wares in kind.

My father was also the supervisor of the passion plays for some forty years, and people would gather at our house from both the upper and lower village on Ashura. From there a grand procession of floats and dasteh sineh-zani (flagellants, mainly boys and young men) would go to the husainiyeh down at the bottom of the lower neighborhood.

For two months before Ashura ("the tenth" of the month of Muharram, the day of the martyrdom of the third Imam,

Husain, on the plains of Karbala) my father would prepare, collecting clothing for costumes, carpets and props for the floats, and reserving particular horses to be ridden. Many items were stored at our house: endowed by the villagers for the passion plays. But no one would refuse a request to lend a fine carpet or chador (veil) or animal: the villagers firmly believed that ill would befall anyone who did not participate in the Ashura events. The best horse in the village was reserved for Shemr, the evil general of the Sunni Syrian army, because he had to be able to catch Husain. The second best horse was reserved for Ali Akbar, the elder son of Husain, because it took time for Shemr to catch him; and traditionally Ali Akbar would fall from his horse so that he could be caught by the aging Shemr. The laziest horse in the village was used to carry the fourth Imam, the only male who survived the massacre at Karbala because he was sick and did not fight. For a month or so my father would supervise rehearsals of the chief actors. Shemr was usually played by the husband of my eldest sister. Shemr had to be tall and have a loud voice with which to frighten people; he was dressed from head to toe in red. Ocassionally, when he was available (because he lived in the city), Shemr would be played by my brother-in-law's brother, because he had blue eyes (as Shemr is said to have had). - Husain had to be a man in his forties with a full beard.

Imam Sajad, the fourth Imam, was played by a sick old man, in many villages an opium addict, but in our village there were no opium addicts -- almost no one was rich enough to support an opium habit -- but by one addicted to a qaliun (hubbly bubbly using a potent form of tobacco).

There were only so many lead roles. Most men participated as porters for the heavy floats. In other villages floats might be carried by trucks, but our village was too steep and narrow. Some twenty floats might be made illustrating all the events of the ten days leading up to Ashura and the days immediately following, when the women and children were taken off as prisoners to Damascus. Other men were in the black shirted lines of men beating their breasts with hands or chains and chanting rhythmic dirges mourning the fate of Husain; they all wore Arab kifayahs (chufiyah) or headbands (aqkal). Only the sick and disabled stood on the sidelines with the women and girls.

For several years, beginning when I was four or five, I played the barely nubile bride of Qassem (the son of Husain, the second Imam, who wedded the daughter of Imam Husain just before entering combat and giving his life to the cause of Husain). I was given this role partly no doubt because I was the son of the producer of the show, and partly as a reward for (or out of my father's pride in) my already being able to recite the Qur'an; also perhaps because I was part

city boy, cleaner, better dressed, and better behaved than other village boys in torn clothes, a boy who might be trusted to blow his nose in the finest silk chador which was reserved for the wife of Qassem. The role was intended to make especially the young girls cry, identifying with the tragic fate of this young widow. I had little white sugar balls (noql) to hand out, received as blessed sweets. In second grade, I finally refused to play a woman any longer. What triggered the refusal I no longer exactly remember, but I remember bursting into angry tears at either being pinched, winked at, or obscenely teased as if I were a girl.

Such teasing and humor had a regular place: the man who played Zeinab (sister of Husain, who led the women and children after the massacre until the sickly fourth Imam could assume his leadership role) always had a big mustache, and when someone would make a rude comment to him, he would show his mustache from under his chador. Typically he had an obscene tongue as well, and would respond to propositioning with such retorts as "yes, I'll sleep with you; bring your mother too." There was less such humor during the actual passion plays than I sometimes saw in the city, but afterwards there would be a lot of ribald mockery of the taziye ("mourning", passion plays). Shemr and Zeinab would replay their repartee from the passion play in obscene variations, e.g.:

Shemr: Agar to Zeinab-i, pas dldol achist? (If you are Zeinab, then what's that penis?)

Zeinab: Khoda donad ke in gusht-i ziadist. (God knows it is an extra piece of meat.)

And indeed some of the acting could stick to the actor: thus someone named Mahmad who played the role of Shemr might come to be called Mahmad Shemr, even if it caused him to bristle and see red.

Once the procession of floats reached the lower village, it would enter the hussaineye and circumabulate counterclockwise. The men were the actors on the husaineye floor, while women sat in up on the walls (ghurfeh, "reviewing stand"). Shemr would gallop into the center calling for Husain to show himself, and announcing to the audience, "I'm neither Shemr, nor is this the land of Karabala; I'm just playing the role." This formula was partly used to fend off the danger that the on-lookers would become so enraged at his killing of their beloved Imam that they would kill him ("in some villages", goes the archetypical Iranian comment, "people actually killed the person playing Shemr"). Partly the formula was to allow Shemr to shed tears, to empty himself as it were, so that he could then take on the hard-hearted role. Then Husain would enter, crying to the people, "Is there no one to help me?" Ali Akbar would then gallop in, dressed in a white shroud,

stained with blood, and sewn with the arrows that had penetrated his body; he always was played by someone of draft age, and was the heart-throb of the girls.

The time frame of the passion play was in fact a mythic, rather than a chronological one, for, of course, all the events were presented on the floats simultaneously prior to and during the action in the center of the husainiyeh. Thus the head of Husain was already on a pole, and the good Christian who attempted to intercede on Husain's behalf was seated on a chair, dressed in safari khaki shirt and shorts, pith helmet, with binoculars, watching the events. The climax of the play came first with Shemr killing Ali Akbar: the lad would fall off his horse and roll in the dust as Shemr cut off his head, while Husain stood by and cried or pretended to cry. (Both actual tears and pretense at tears on the part of contemporary believers is has merit, savab.) And then, Shemr would kill Husain, at which point everyone would rush into the middle, beating their heads in grief.

Afterwards people rushed to eat the blessed wheat stews (ash-e gandom) that were cooked in massive cauldrons. These communal meals were supplied either from perpetual endowments, vows made during the year, or by richer villagers. They usually contained meat of a freshly slaughtered lamb. I remember with amusement scenes of people eating stew communally off big trays, jockeying to

make sure they were sitting next to someone relatively clean with whom to share their dipping.

Such communal meals were also important during the month of Ramadan (the month of fasting from dawn to dusk). The month was known as the month of God, a time when there was double merit for good deeds, when the rich paid their debts to God by cooking cauldrons of stew to distribute, sharing the meat of a slaughtered lamb, and sending gifts of dry provisions (e.g. rice) to their neighbors. My father's father served in his day as the village time-keeper: he was one of the first in the village to have a pocket watch, and just before dawn he would sing hymns of praise to the first Imam (monajot) to waken people. Traditionally villagers would start their fast with the rooster's crow. The first pocket watches did not change things much, since people only could tell time when the two hands came together at noon and midnight. Thus, watches were called zohr-i kuk and qurur-kuk (crow of noon, crow of midnight). Just before dawn my father's father would sing out the formula, "Abast o teriak" (only time for a "sip of water and a pull of opium"). It is said that my father's father (he died before I was born) would often substitute the phrase, "Kaseye tut-i khosk o kuzeh ab" (only time for a "bowl of dried mulberries" -- the main produce of our village --" and a jug of water"). And then he would conclude: tanbal kahnekha ya

allah ("get up you lazy bums"). After he died, this role was taken over first by Amu Ali (Uncle Ali), of whom it is said, the first time he saw a radio, he recited the shahadah, the credo of Islam, and in mock surprise exclaimed, so here is the proof of what the preachers say, that at the end of time people can hear each other no matter what the distance. (Radios were enormously popular, and after the first one came to the village, everyone else immediately had to have one.) Then Akbar-i Ramazan took over the role of calling people to the fast: he eventually became the father-in-law of my father, when my father took a second wife after the death of my mother.

Villagers took the fast of Ramadan quite seriously, and I remember my mother, when we lived in the city, worried about their poverty and nutrition and would send tea and sugar to the village.

On Genealogy, Naming, and the Judaicizing Anxiety

My mother was a city girl, the daughter of Gholam Husayn Vassel, a shopkeeper, sufi, zurkhaneh (traditional gymnasium) master, popular story-teller, wit, and interpreter of Rumi's Masnavi. He had married the daughter of a rich merchant, Hajj Muhammad Karim Esfahani, who had come to Yazd from Isfahan. Hajj Muhammad-Karim's wife was Maryam, and her father was Yusuf Aghaii, a Jewish rabbi who had converted to Islam in a striking episode. My mother

would often say, "the children of Yusuf Aghaii are scattered throughout the world; but we do not know very many of them". What she meant was that children of converts assimilate among Muslims without leaving much trace, but they carry a certain kind of character legacy.

Several morality plots interlace in her invocations of my great great grandfather. First there is the story of Yusuf Aghaii's conversion. As you know, Jews were not allowed into the produce bazaar during the day, but only at the end of the day. Being najes (carriers of pollution), they could not touch the produce lest it be declared polluted. To ensure that Muslims got first pick as well as religiously pure food, Jews had to wait until the end of the day to shop. Yusuf Aghaii at then end of one day went to buy some yoghurt. He dipped his finger in it to see if it was still good, and rejected it as sour. The shopkeeper raised a ruckus, crying that Yusuf had defiled the entire container of yoghurt. A crowd gathered and started to turn ugly. Yusuf, in an effort to escape, said, I may be as good a Muslim as you. The shopkeeper retorted: let us go to the mujtahed and see. So the crowd took Yusuf to the mujtahed who publically forced him to eat some yoghurt and meat together, thereby violating Jewish dietary rules. It is said that thereafter the Jews rejected him, but that his father, also a rabbi, asked to be allowed to name Yusuf's

first child: it was a girl, and the name chosen was Maryam. Now Yusuf had studied both Hebrew and Arabic in Jerusalem, and so, it is said, when he became Muslim he did not need to study any Islamic jurisprudence: he knew it all, and was as learned as any mujtahed.

The anecdote illustrates a very interesting anxiety reflected throughout Islamic literature about the jurisprudential competence and influence of Jewish converts to Islam. The anxiety begins already with accounts of early Islam and the influence on the compilation of hadith and rules of interpretation of the Jewish convert Kaab al-Akhbar, and of Wahb ibn Munabih. The latter was a particularly important conveyor of Isra'iliyyat traditions into early Islam. Well versed in Hebrew, the torah, psalms and talmud, he himself was a Yemini, originally of either Jewish (some traditions identify him only as ahl-i kitab, or of the "people of the Book", which could be Jewish or Christian {Mehdi's version -- verify}) or of Persian descent (some accounts call him an abna, i.e. of those descended from troops sent to Yemen by Khosrow Anushiravan {Abd al-Aziz Duri's version}). But the anxiety continues in the texts of the contemporary Muhammad Motahhari regarding such a key figures such as Razi whom he wants to prove was not only Muslim but Shi'ite (on Motahhari, see Chapter 3). My mother, moreover, would say that once a Zoroastrian or a

Christian converted to Islam, that was that; but when a Jew converted there was always danger of reverting back for up to seven generations.

One day when I came home as a child, very upset that I was not a sayyid (descendant of the Prophet, entitled to wear a green or black turban), she consoled me by saying that we were another kind of sayyid, that through Yusuf Aghaii we were descended from Haroun (Aron), the brother of Moses, and that this could be seen in our entire family's gift of gab and rhetorical flair. Haroun, of course, was known for his silver tongue, and the story is well known that when the baby Moses was brought to Pharoah, Pharoah tested him by placing before the child some dates and some red hot coals. The diviners had suggested that if it were just an ordinary child it would be attracted to the bright red objects, but if this were the future prophet it would know better and take a date. The child in fact began to reach for the coal, but the angel Gabriel took its hand and caused Moses to pick up the coal and put it on his tongue. Hence Moses stuttered, and when he went to plead his people's case before Pharoah, God advised him to take Haroun along. And so, the majority of Jews are relatively quiet types, but the descendants of Aaron are loquacious and persuasive. And hence, "the children of Yusuf Aghaii (Jewish converts) are scattered throughout the world, but we

do not recognize them as such".

Jews, of course, were ambivalent figures in my mother's discourse: she would use Yusuf Aghaii both as reproof when she scolded me and as explanation when I did something intelligent. In the negative vein, she used to cite the popular hadith, *al bala olil awlia* ("the people of catastrophe/sadness are friends of God"), identifying Jews as not friends of God: when Jews raise their faces to God, the angels would immediately demand God grant their wishes so that the stench of the Jews would disappear; but when the faithful prayed, the angels would tell God to delay granting their wishes so that they might look longer on their faces. Thus it was often repeated that Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet, had to wait eighteen years for her wish to be granted.

My mother had a similar discourse about Zoroastrians, albeit less complicated by negative elements. When we moved to Yazd, we lived in Pir-i Borj Neighborhood near some coppersmiths who made the distinctive tinned copper *masrabeh* water pitchers used by Zoroastrians. And so I would see Zoroastrians go by, dressed in their distinctive pyjamas with elastic at the ankles, and the women with the colorful red and green *makna'eh* headcloths instead of somber black chador veils. My mother explained that people called them *gowr* or *gabr*, but that they did not like these names; that

they respected fire and had fire temples as we had mosques; and that they were relatives of Imam Husain, because the daughter of the last Zoroastrian emperor of pre-Islamic Iran, Yazdegird III, had married Imam Husain. She said, one could often see Zoroastrians crying outside the Muslim mourning memorials on Ashura, because Husain was their son-in-law. All our ancestors, she would say, were gabr. Although there were no Zoroastrians in our village, my pesar ame (father's sister's son) who married my elder sister (and played Shemr in the village passion play) also thought well of the Zoroastrians, and would go from the village to their mountain shrine, Pir-i Naraki (see Fischer 1973) to work for them on their annual pilgrimage, doing butchering, selling fruit, and helping set up. School books also stressed the Zoroastrian heritage of pre-Islamic Iran, and as a child, I did not feel any particular contradiction between pride in that heritage and Islam. Zoroastrians in general had a reputation for honesty, in sharp contrast to Muslims and Jews. There is a famous story in Yazd that one Ramadan, only two persons sighted the moon, signalling the end of the fasting, a Muslim and a Zoroastrian. Two reliable witnesses are required, and non-Muslims normally do not count as a full witness. People went to Hajj Agha Lab-i Khandaq, a mujtahed of the Modaressi family, and he said to bring the Zoroastrian. He asked him what is the color of

the inside of your skullcap, and the man took it off to look at it before answering, "red". Hajj Agha said his witnessing of the moon could be accepted.

My mother's father, Gholam Husain Vassel, must have been a prosperous young man to have married the only daughter of Hajj Muhammad-Karim, but he was a sufi in the true sense, spending all he had, and not valuing the material world. Originally he was a mazari (a processor of henna). He owned a factory and helped others to establish similar factories in Yazd and Ardakan. [Yazd is still known as a center of henna processing. The raw material comes from further east in Kirman province.] He had travelled a great deal, and composed an epic poem about his adventures, which ended: Abul Qassem sits like a mouse/ Creditors raise hell/ Once claps his forehead / Another beats his breast/ Most upset of all is the broker.

Indeed Gholam-Husain had to sell the business to pay off his debts. He later bought a small grocery; it caught fire and burned. For the last fourteen years of his life, he was blind, and he died destitute. He seemed not to mind: the world was but a passage to the real life. But I think it was after the death of his young wife that he lost interest in the world. He raised his son and three daughters with difficulty, managing to educate them and marry them, albeit none lived up to his mark. His son, Abul

Qassem, a tailor, married the daughter of a mullah, but had no offspring. His youngest daughter, Khojasteh, married a coppersmith, and had three sons and a daughter, all of whom are educated and relatively prosperous. The eldest daughter, Marziyeh, married a sugar shop employee, who suddenly disappeared for seven years, then reappeared with a good education from India and became a customs clerk in Ahwaz. They had a daughter (Rakhshandeh) and three sons: Muhammad-Ali Sirjani became a physician and major in the army and died a suspicious death in the recent revolution; Mahmud became a high school teacher; and Mehdi died at age eighteen shortly before I was born, contributing to the conundrums of my own naming.

My mother's father's death is among my earliest memories. When I related this memory to my mother many years later she was quite surprised. His bed was in the middle of the summer room, and everyone sat around him. The barber came and trimmed his grey beard, but when he touched the mustache, grandfather stopped him, waving his hand to say, not this part. Then a few minutes later (my mother corrected me that it was a few days later), when I was crawling near the courtyard pond (hawzeh) with a little bell around my neck, my mother suddenly came into the courtyard wailing.

My mother, Farkhondeh, was the middle daughter.

Beautiful with thick black hair down to her knees, always braided and hanging on her back, she was witty, a living encyclopedia of poetry, a hafez of the Qur'an (a hafez is one who memorizes the entire Qur'an), a weaver, and a professional dress weaver. The neighborhood women loved her and called our house bagh-i delgosha ("garden of the open heart") because she had a way of making even the saddest person laugh, and because despite our poverty she was the most generous of souls. She had her most beautiful moments with God, when she melodiously sang the Qur'an and prayers. Despite my love for my father, I must say, she was a world wasted in his house. Once I asked her why she had married him. She said it was her fate. (She was twelve when she married; he was twenty-eight.)

My father, the spoiled, only son of a relatively well-to-do farmer had been encouraged by his parents to marry a city girl. My father's father owned a house in Yazd in the same neighborhood as my mother's family; and so periodically he would come from Dareh to collect the rent and to sell dried mulberries. My mother's family had fallen on hard times, and so was happy to give their daughter to a villager who could at least guarantee steady food. Otherwise a villager could never have dreamed of marrying a granddaughter of Haj Muhammad-Karim. In the village, my father owned some land and was well-connected: his father's

sister had married the eldest son of the then katkhoda (headman), Hajj Ismail, who must have owned half the village. (My own sister eventually married a grandson of Hajj Ismail -- the man who played Shemr in the passion play.) If his village occupations and religious roles, I have already spoken in the preceding section.

If the date of my birth certificate is to be believed, I was born on the tenth of Shahrivar 1331 Shamsi (August 31, 1952). I was the sixth surviving child. My oldest sister, Safa, had already married two years earlier, and had a son; she married the eldest son of my only father's sister. My brother Ahmad was the second child, and there were three other sisters: Ezzat, Fatemeh, and Robab. My mother was to have, all told, fourteen pregnancies, of which seven survived. (I have a younger brother.) According to my mother, she was baking bread in the basement kitchen when she felt the labor pains. Everyone had gone to the fields to pick fruit. The old midwife, Robabeh, was a neighbor and could be called in emergency, but my mother thought she had time to finish the breads. When she realized there was no time, it was too late, and she could hardly move. She called out a few times, but no one heard. She began reciting prayers, hoping someone would stop by. So I was born. She cut the cord, wrapped me in some clothes, put me under a basket with a stone on top, so no animal could get

at me, and went to call Robabeh. When everyone returned, there was joy that I was a boy, that is, on everyone's part except my elder brother, who felt his special status threatened. A teaspoon of water with some sacred earth of Karbala was poured into my mouth, and the credo of Islam whispered into my ear.

My father named me Mehdi, but since my eighteen year old cousin (mother's sister's son), also Mehdi, had just died, my family decided to address me as Gholam Husain, or "Gholi" for short, the name of both my grandfathers. The name, Mehdi, was used only on the birth certificate, and I was seven before I learned my real name. That happened because when I was registered for school in Yazd, my legal name was given, and the teacher called out "Mehdi Abedi" at first I did not respond, though I had a vague feeling it might be me. I had never liked the name Gholi, which I associated both with the word for ghouls (ghul) and the word for a small bell (ghuri) which had been tied around my neck as an toddler. So I went home and said I wanted to be called "Mehdi". The custom of changing an infant's name, if there was a death or illness in the family, or even to "sell" the child to another set of parents, was a kind of evil eye avoidance, to confuse the forces of harm so they could not find or identify the child. It is of historical interest that the name Mehdi was not particularly popular

earlier in the century, but became very popular for children of my age cohort. This was no arbitrary flux of fashion but a kind of campaign launched by Muslim believers to thumb their noses at the Bahais (who claimed that the Mahdi had already come in the person of Bahauallah).

Similarly at the same time, it became popular to call the Mahdi or Imam Zaman, "Ala Hazrat" ("His Majesty") to deny the use of that title by the Shah. Pro-Khomeini activists however soon called for a ban on this practice, as well as on all monarchical titles for the Imams: thus they asked that one no longer refer to the eighth Imam, Imam Reza, as "al-Sultan" or "Shah-i Khorasan"; nor should one call Ali, "Shah-i Vilayat". Instead the Imams ought to be called "Abd-i Saleh Khodah" ("Righteous Servant of God"). The struggle between religious sources of legitimacy and royal ones were symbolized in cities like Yazd by the azan, the call to prayer, which served as a public time-keeping device, and by the drum and trumpet sounds (naqareh khaneh and surna) at dawn and dusk issuing from atop the governor's palace. My mother used to say she could always tell from the vigor of the especially the latter how stable the government was: when loud and martial, the Governor was in full control, when the sound was more playful it was a harbinger that the musicians could feel the Governor on the defensive and liable to be deposed. When Reza Shah was

deposed, she reported, people said the trumpets' sound bursts seemed to be saying "tu kos-i zan-i shah" ("up the shah's wife's . . .").

On Learning to Read: Qur'anic Literacy

At age five one was sent to a female mullah who would have up to ten students. In the Yazd area, mullah is the proper term for those who taught the rudiments of reading. Each student would have a small carpet or goatskin on which to sit, kept at the mullah's house. Going to the mullah was somewhat terrifying, for she would threaten to send one to the surokh-i mar-mush khaneh (the snake-mouse hole, i.e. the dark basement, especially scary in the village mud houses perpetually falling into ruin), or she might use her knitting needle to draw blood from the back of your hand, or she might bastinado the soles of your feet, if you did not do your lessons. There were special books for learning the Qur'an, and as one finished each book there was a ceremony, : noql kardan, in which sweets and coins and nuts mixed together would be sprinkled over the young scholar's head, which other children could scramble for; and there would be a gift for the scholar. I remember with some embarrassment that at my first such ceremony, my mother wanted to honor me, but we were so poor she could only afford the sweets and not a gift. Knowing the situation, I also scrambled for the noql to the dismay of my mother.

When I was five we spent the winter in the city (Yazd), and I was sent to a pious woman mullah to teach me the Qur'an. In the Yazd area, mullah is the proper term for one who teaches the rudiments of literacy. (Hence Jews were often addressed with the title "Mullah", because they were almost univesally literate.) Her name was Monavvar, and she had about ten students, each at a different level. While teaching, she also made bags for a henna company, and we sometimes helped. She taught me the alphabet, and the reading of the first sureh of the Qur'an. I already knew much of the Qur'an by heart because my mother was a hafez and she often recited parts of it. It was a tradition to have a celebration (noql kardan) when students finished the first sureh; the first, second, and eighth joz' (thirtieths) of the Qur'an; and of course when they finished the whole Qur'an. Round sugar balls (noql) mixed with nuts and coins would be sprinkled over the scholar's head, and the other children could scramble to collect them. There would be a gift for the scholar. The teacher also would be given gifts relative to the family status of the child.

The beginning three books were: Qur'an-i Yek Joz'. This opens in Arabic with three sentences: "He is the opener and He is the One who knows. God made it easy, don't make it difficult. Make it easy for us all, God of the world." This is memorized. Next is the alphabet, then the

alphabet with vowels. Then comes the first sureh of the Qur'an, which is also one of the shortest. Then the last joz' (thirtieth) of the Qur'an, ending with Sureh Nabba (Amme). (This last joz' is done in reverse order, because the shorter sureh are at the end. In normal sequence, Sureh Nabba is the first of the last joz'. Qur'an-i Do Joz'. This is Sureh Qiamat and Sureh Tabarake (or Molk). Qur'an-i Hasht Joz'. This ends with Sureh Yasin. The rest of the Qur'an was felt to be easy, and would be done at one swoop or at most two.

This constituted the introduction to Arabic literacy. One then went on to Hafez as the introduction to Persian literacy. Various things might follow Hafez: the Masnavi of Rumi was particularly popular. All of this was just reading, not writing. My older sisters learned the Qur'an and Hafez this way. They can no longer really read, but they can open Hafez and "read" the familiar verses they have half memorized. Such literacy was referred to as "knowing black from white" (siahi ba sefidi farq gozashtand), i.e. the print from the page. This is the refence of the term for literacy, savad, from the Arabic word for black (sud).

I did not get to Hafez with the Mullah Monaver. I got through the first three books listed above, at which point I celebrated my first noql kardan. I remember with some embarrassment that my mother wanted to do the ceremony, but

we were so poor that she could only afford the noql and not a gift. I knew the situation, and so I also scrambled for the noql and coins, probably to the dismay of my mother.

Following the celebration, we went back to the village where I was sent to another mullah, an old shroud weaver. Despite the high infant mortality rate, there was barely enough work for her to make a living making shrouds, so she also taught the Qur'an. Each student had a little carpet or goatskin on which to sit which we kept at her house. Going to this mullah could be terrifying, for she would threaten to send us to the surokh-i mar-mush khaneh (the snake-mouse hole, i.e. the dark basement, particularly scary in a village mud house perpetually falling into ruins), or she might use her knitting needle to draw blood from the back of our hands, or she might bastinado the bottoms of our feet, if we did not do our lessons properly. I did not like her and soon quit. So I was placed with another mullah, a young widow, a weaver with long dark hair. Her husband had died during a hunting trip from a fall in the mountains. She had a lovely voice, and would sing with the rhythm of her loom. She taught us the rules of ritual cleanliness, and the daily prayers. We were mischievous kids, and there were opportunities for mischievousness when we were sent to the river to do the ablutions for prayer. There were trees that provided cover from being watched too closely. Our leader

was a girl of about eight or nine. She liked to take her pants off, and we liked to watch. In the villages, children who are around animals learn about sex earlier perhaps than children in the city, even if they do not connect sex with pregnancy. We would play at sex, comparing penis sizes, having erections, and fellatio. One day of course someone saw us, and raised a fuss. The big girl never came back to learn the Qur'an. [Compare the opening scene in A.R. Sharkawi's *Egyptian Earth*, 1962.] We were told that watching sexual intercourse or looking at genitals would cause blindness. There were several blind people in the village, and I thought they must have looked at things they were not supposed to. (It was not until I was in third grade that I understood about procreation. After reporting a classmate's account, my mother first said that children were created by the will of God, then that they came out of the belly button, and finally that tiny babies come from the father's back through his penis into the mother's stomach. I recall Oedipal anger at my father, and resisted the idea that my parents had actually engaged in intercourse.)

We were taught the principles of religion (usul-e din) in a kind of catechismic form. "God is one, He is not two", as if preparing us for the argument against the dualism of our ancient Zoroastrian heritage, and the Zoroastrian minority among us. (Similarly, later my secondary school

teacher, Nayeb Kabir, would stress that Muhammad was not the last Prophet, against the belief of the Baha'is.) My father promised me a rial coin when I could name all twelve Imams, and he would set me on his knee, to ask, "Who is your first Imam?" "Ali, Commander of the Believers." . . . "Who is your third Imam?" "Imam Husain, the martyr" (and I would think of Shemr in the passion play killing Ali). "Who is your fourth Imam?" "Zayn al-Abidin, the invalid," and I would think of Akbar Ramazan, the sickly old man who played the fourth Imam in the passion plays. Another one rial coin was promised when I could recite my ten furu'-e din: prayer, fasting, khums, zakat, hajj, jihad, enjoining the good, preventing evil, loving the allies of God, hating the opponents of God. Jihad brought to mind the image of Ali with his doubled edged sword, and I thought of him as constantly riding his horse killing enemies of God. Of the hajj, I only knew it had something to do with the wealthy; and of khoms I knew it was money the wealthy were to pay to sayyids, who were descendants the Prophet and his daughter Fatima and who thus were of an essence different from non-sayyids.

Purity rules were something inculcated in the process of life. As a child I had to eat from a separate bowl, while the older members of the family shared a large bowl. Only when I had just come from the bath house was I

permitted to share in the big bowl. So I learned that children were impure (najes) because they are in contact with urine, feces, and other polluting agents, and they cannot be expected to know to wash their hands. Especially with wet hands, children were not to touch many things. The female mullahs would not allow their students to touch the Qur'an: to point at verses, pupils had to make paper arrows. (Everyone, of course, makes minor ablutions, wodu, for daily prayers and touching the Qur'an. I must have been nearly seven when I refused to eat from a separate bowl, and my mother agreed to let me eat from the large bowl if I washed my hands and face first. Thus I became a bachah mumayyiz (child with discriminating sense).

I had learned just over half the Qur'an when I quit my studies with the mullah. My mother decided it was enough for the time being. It was a bad year of drought. Many villagers had left to work as construction workers in the city. There was nothing to eat except bread made of American wheat. For some reason it was uncleaned, and one day a piece of bread baked with this wheat got stuck in my mouth. When my mother pulled it out, it was found to contain a large thorn. She angrily threw away the rest of the bread and declared that she would no longer live this miserable life in the village and subsist on charity. She would go to the city and work as a maid for her mother's

brother, and she would take me: I was old enough to earn a little money. My father got very angry. But a few days later we packed for the city, and left.

Scenes of an Urban Childhood: Class Distinctions

[Schools are fascinating arenas of class differentiation, as well as, for some, routes of mobility into different classes. Mehdi came from the poorest level of rural migrants to the city, and consequently the advisability of his continuing education rather than earning money was repeatedly open to question. A second repeated, very Middle Eastern, theme is that of selfless patronage by certain better off individuals of gifted poor students. Schools were partly stratified by class, and were sharply affected by the changing pedagogical and disciplinary ideologies associated with modernization. Mehdi stood out in the public primary school because he already knew how to read; children of the more secular middle classes had not been sent to a mullah, partly because the middle classes were rejecting the tradition of harsh schools. Harsh discipline in certain schools, however, seemed to contribute to excellence, and the semi-Islamic schools were often among those with reputations for both harshness and excellence. Part of the not always healthy dynamic was the competition among teachers and schools for recognition and rewards for producing the best students. Discipline and rote learning

were the subject of much debate and despair among American peace corps teachers in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s as well as among foreign university professors. But perhaps most interestingly is the contribution of cadre provided by the semi-Islamic school system (mentioned briefly in this section and more fully in the next) to the leadership of the Iranian revolution of 1979, and also to the leadership of marxist factions of the early stages of the revolution.]

We settled in a small mud-brick house: two small rooms, a small, dark basement kitchen, and an even darker storage room, plus a well with non-potable water. It had belonged to my mother's father, and was part of her bridewealth. It is still there, in Mahalleh Pirborj: Sarhang Towfiq Alley (called Paknejad Alley today), Farjad Cul-de-Sac. (Dr. Paknejad, a physician, was the head of the local anti-Baha'i crusade, and an associate of Ayatullah Saduqi. After the revolution, he became a member of Parliament, and then was assassinated by the Mujaheddin-i Khalq, as was Ayatullah Saduqi. Both will appear again as important figures in my story.) The cul-de-sac had five houses: two belonged to villagers from our neighbor village, Gowsha; one belonged to a widow from our village who had lost her husband and who worked in the local public bath house. The fifth belonged to a businessman, and was rented to my first educational saviour, Ali Akbar Afsar Yaghmai'i, a retired mayor of

Shahrbabak (a small town between Yazd and Kirman, famed for being the seat of the Ismaili imam until the nineteenth century when he moved to India and took the title, Agha Khan; it is still an center for Ismailis).

For several days after we arrived in Yazd, my father tried to find me a job, but everyone he tried said I was too young and too unhealthy looking. The last place we tried was a small zilû factory (zilûs are a flat-weave floor covering, cheaper and usually larger than gelims or as the latter are better known in the West, kelims, the Turkish name). I remember my father was frustrated and angry, and as we arrived back at our cul-de-sac at sunset, we saw Ali Akbar Afsar Yaghmai'i standing under a street light, dressed in a three piece suit, tie, shined shoes, playing with his worry beads. He was about sixty. We knew who he was, and my father salaamed and bowed as villagers do to well-dressed urban men. Mr. Yaghmai'i responded warmly and I remember distinctly approximately the following exchange:

- "You must be our new neighbor?"
- "Yes, sir!", my father replied humbly.
- "Is this your son?"
- "Yes, sir. He is your servant if you need one."
- "You are sending him to school, I suppose."
- "School? No. We are from the village. None of my children have gone to school."

- "Times have changed. You must send this one to school. He looks bright. Who knows, perhaps he will have a bright future."

My father laughed and did not take him seriously. At six a child should earn his bread. In the village a child would work in the fields or herd sheep and goats. Mr. Yaghmaii knew this and continued:

- "Public schools are free and I will pay for his paper and pencils. He can also eat in our house. It won't cost you anything."

My father was delighted. Like a seller of goats, he pushed me towards the man, saying, "He is yours."

- "Then, tomorrow morning you will register him for school. I will write a recommendation."

This encounter shaped my destiny. Many years later I learned that Ali Akbar was a grandson of the famous poet Yaghma. He himself was educated, a poet, a lover of music and of books. The door to his house was open, and every day he had guests. He smoked: both cigarettes and opium. His wife was unlettered but his children, three sons and three daughters, all were being educated. Manuchehr was already a teacher; Amir was in high school; Morteza was in fourth grade; the eldest daughter had completed primary school and had just married a cousin, Mirza Mehdi, a health agent in the campaign against small-pox; Neisan was in high school;

and Nasrin was my age and classmate. Mirza Mehdi lived with his father-in-law and eventually had a son and two daughters. I will come back to this family.

I was registered in the Adab elementary school, the nearest to our house. Adab turned out to be the school to which all the elite sent their children, and I was made to feel my inferiority along with the other poorer kids in the class. The first thing that happened, on the very first day, was that I was slapped by the principal, Mr. Gummi, for coming to school without shoes. As far as I had been concerned until then, shoes were to protect the feet from the rough earth and mountain terrain; but it was fine to go barefoot on the soft sandy soil of the city. I soon learned that there was a different purpose to shoes in school. So my father had to buy me a pair of shoes, made with soles cut from old tires. Other things also set us poorer kids apart: the upper class kids had full heads of hair, while we had shaved heads. The upper class kids were well-dressed, and a number of them were fat.

Every morning at eight thirty -- sometimes at eight -- Mirza Muhammad, the janitor, rang the bell. The bell and its hammer were a contraption put together from two metal pieces of an old car. At the bell, we were to stand in line according to grade. Verses of the Qur'an were recited, a prayer, salutations to the Prophet and his family, good

wishes for the Shah, and a request to God to preserve the country. A student then read statements (announcements? hortations?) and everyone repeated after him. I enjoyed the thunderous united voice. Then everyone held up the back of their hands for the principal to inspect our cleanliness. Hair had to be short, except for the sons of the governor, chief of police, and other elite families. Violators of the standards of cleanliness were punished. God forbid somebody's hand should be dirty. The principal, Mr. Gummi, carried a leather whip, and was feared. He was tall and skinny, about forty, with dark eyes, gold teeth, curly hair, bad tempered and nervous, but always well-dressed. There were stories that he had whipped delinquent and lazy students one hundred lashes. Many kids wet their pants at just a severe look or slap from him, but I was a village boy and used to such treatment from my father and older brother. After inspection we filed into our classes.

The first grade teacher was Mr. Aminian, a stocky man with greying hair. He had an accent. Some kids thought he was a new Muslim, a convert from Zoroastrianism; others said he was a Muslim from Ardakan. Who dared ask him? Everything about our teachers was a mystery. There were too many students in the first grade; kids fought over the seats. Everyone wanted to sit with a friend; no one wanted to sit with me. On the second day, the principal appeared

without his whip and asked the kids who were poor and dirty like me to come outside and stand in line. I thought we were going to be beaten, but we were led to another school, the newly established Dr. Khan Ali (? who is Dr. Khan Ali?!) school in the Pusht-i Khan Ali Neighborhood [the Zoroastrian Quarter of Yazd].

I felt even more lost at the new school, and when the last bell rang, I had no idea how to get home. I began to cry. A group gathered round and asked my father's name, but no one knew him. A passing mule-cart with construction material stopped; the driver recognized my father's name as a fellow employee and gave me a lift. And so I found my father who was covered in mud. I told the story of my day's travail, and that evening my father met with Mr. Yaghmaii. The latter promised to help bring me back to the Adab school. He wrote a letter, and the next morning, my father took it to the principle. There was an argument: Mr. Qummi shouted at my father and said he would do nothing. My father angrily threatened to complain to the director of the office of education. So, I continued to attend the second school.

We began to learn the alphabet which I already knew except for the letters which do not exist in Arabic. I was the only one who knew this much, and so I became a kind of teacher's assistant. I would read out the letters loudly,

and the others would repeat, while the teacher made sure they were looking at the board. The teacher liked me, and I began to like the school. Two weeks later, the principal came and called me out of the class. He and the teacher then got into an argument, and it took a while for me to realize that I was being transferred back to the Adab school. The teacher shouted, "They've sent me the dumbest, poorest, and most unwanted children. This is the only different one and I'm not going to let him go. If distance is the problem, I'll give him a ride on my bicycle back and forth every day." So the principal phoned Principal Gummi at Adab school telling him I was happy here and they would persuade my father to let me stay. Half an hour later, however, Mirza Muhammad, the janitor of the Adab school, arrived to fetch me. I was mortified at the trouble I had caused. As soon as we arrived at Adab, I was asked to read the alphabet, which I did. "What a mistake we made," the principal said to Mr. Aminian. I was taken to the classroom and put at the blackboard, and I experienced the admiration of the other kids. I knew things others did not, all thanks to the Qur'an.

Mr. Aminian was rough in his punishment: his technique was to put a pencil between the victim's fingers and squeeze his hand. He never did this to me, but I tried it a few times on myself and it was very painful. In second grade,

with Mr. Varasteh, I have few memories: he was calm and seldom beat the children. When he did, he used a wooden ruler which was not so painful. The third grade teacher, Mr Mahrami, was older than the other teachers, also calm, and never beat the kids, even when they played tricks on him. He was respected by the other teachers for his fine calligraphy.

In fourth grade, there was a new teacher, Mr. Pedarzadeh, young, handsome, witty, talkative, charismatic. Looking back, I now think he must have had communist leanings. Having come from a poor family, he was particularly sympathetic to the poorer students, and he often told stories of poor children who became famous, such as the son of a furrier who became Nadir Shah, king of Iran, as well as, of course, the case of Reza Shah Pahlavi. He used me too as a kind of example, thereby also intending to encourage me. I'll never forget one day, he brought me a set of notebooks and presented them to me in class as a sign to the other students that despite my poverty, I was doing well and he expected me to continue doing so. In return I tried to please him by improving my handwriting. He used to make speeches at public events, such as the annual gathering of the Anjoman-i Khanh va Madaraseh (a club of richer parents who aided poorer students), and he began to teach me to deliver his speeches in his stead, saying he thought it

would make the pitch more effective.

My worst memories are of the sixth grade: a mixture of unjust humiliation and childish religious terror, precipitated by weekly report cards that had been introduced the preceeding year. Each week teachers were supposed to write progress reports to the parents, and the parents were supposed to write replies. In the fifth grade I used to help the teacher, Mr. Reyhani, write these reports, even learning to replicate his signature. That year a city-wide education contest was introduced as well, and I won first prize for the fifth grade. The prize was a box of colored pencils for me and a handsome volume of Sa'di's poetry for my teacher. But in sixth grade my luck turned sour. One day the weekly reports were found scattered about, some torn up. The teacher, Mr. Kebritian, suspected the poorer kids, and for some reason after questioning everyone, he decided I was the culprit. He accused me in class and kicked me out to the jeers of the rest of the class. I was humiliated and enraged, hoping God would strike him dead. There were rumors that he was not really sure and that he was planning to bring a tiggh-i hazrat-i Abbas ("blade of Abbas," the half-brother of Imam Husain and martyr of Karballa). [This was a divining technique used with servants and children. Four sticks are held by two persons seated face to face, so the sticks form two rows end to end. The accused places his

arm between the sticks and, while someone reads the Qur'an, one watches to see if the sticks move inward to pinch the accused (guilty) or apart (innocent).] I was ready to submit to this test to prove my innocence, though I was haunted by it in my dreams. I would wake up screaming having dreamt that the device actually cut through my arm. My mother would say prayers and try to put me back to sleep. Next I tried writing a letter to put in the largest shrine in town. I had heard that helpless women often did this, that the "son of the Imam" (Imamzadeh, saint) who was asleep, rather than being dead, inside the grave of the shrine would read the letters and then would appear in the dreams of, say, an accuser to defend the innocent victim. I delivered the letter, and begged the saint with tears to convince Mr. Kebritian that I had not done it. As this did not work, I began to lose faith in the shrine, but then I remembered that saints do not answer sinners. And so I not only began to increase my prayers and Qur'an recitations, but all the memories of sins of my childhood began to plague me, the sexual playing in the village, the stealing of the melon from Hajji, and so many other things. I repented of all my sins and vowed never to repeat them. None of this helped. Indeed one day, Mr. Kebritian caught me making a print on paper with some soot: I had made a pattern of small needle holes and was teaching myself a primitive sort of

silkscreening, thrilled by my success. Kebritian took me to the principal, Mr. Fakhraddini, complaining of my troublesomeness. I tried to voice my own griveances, but to no avail: Fakhraddini shouted insults at me and threatened to kick me out of school. Fortunately the sixth grade final exams were not given in class but were held on a city-wide level at another school under the proctoring of other teachers. I scored third or fourth in the city, first in the class from my school. I was not satisfied, but our school was not ranked the best in town. That honor was held by the Islami school where children of rich and religious families went: it was supposed to have the best teachers. At the awards ceremony, Principal Fakhraddin hypocritically presented me as an outstanding student. I don't think I have ever hated anyone as much as I hated Kebritian and Fakhraddin.

During these primary school years, my father came to the school thrice, each time to remind my teachers that a child should be beaten periodically. Now he did not want me to go to school any longer.. It was time to work and earn some money. My brother needed a clerk and was jealous of my schooling. My father decided that for the summer months I could first work with him as a construction worker. I kept careful track of how much I worked and should be paid, but at the end of the summer when I went to the contractor's

shop to get my pay, I found my father had already taken it. I came home in tears, and my mother and father had a big argument about my money.

Many people told me to continue my education, and so I went to Afshar High School to ask about the possibilities. Because of my grades I was admitted free of charge, and books were provided from a charity fund.

Secondary School, Sexual Purity, and Marriage

[At the time of the revolution of 1979 the international press professed shock at the degree to which the religious rules disseminated by the Shi'ite clergy seemed to have to do with the purity code. These rules are dealt with in our introduction to Khomeini's *Risaleh Towzih al-Masa'il* (A Clarification of Questions) (Fischer & Abedi 1984). The texture of fear and desire that is manipulated by the religious code during childhood, and especially at adolescence, is not unfamiliar to the religious traditions of Europe. There is an openness and immediacy about these manipulations in a society that is still close to a face-to-face society of restricted literacy, where religious codes still operate as basic mechanisms of psychic as well as public control. These codes are registered not only in language and behavior, but also in dreams.]

Afshar High School was one of the three *Ta'limat-i Islami* schools in Yazd. The *Ta'limat-i Islami* schools were a compromise between the old style seminary system and the modern schools. They were under government supervision, but included religious programs supervised by *Ta'limat-i Islami* headquarters in Tehran. All students were Muslim. Noon and afternoon prayers were done at school. The system had been established first in Tehran by a cleric named Shaykh Abbas Ali Islami. In Yazd, it was the cleric Sayyid Ali Muhammad

Vaziri, who was to become my second educational savior, who introduced the program. Afshar was the name of a businessman who provided the building for the secondary school; another businessman from Kirman, Hajj Ramazani endowed a house for the primary school; and a third school was established in a suburb of Kheirabad. The primary school, Dabiristan-i Talimat-i Islami Ramazani, maintained an unrivalled excellence. Initially the students wore long cloaks on the collar of which appeared the student's name, class, and school emblem so that if they did something in the streets they could be identified. The principal, Mr. Ra'uf, was famed for his strictness, but he collected the best teachers. The school, however, was expensive and served primarily the rich and the well-to-do religious families.

The secondary school, Dabiristan Talimat-i Islami Afshar, was not quite so good, but it was not bad. Our geometry and religion teacher, Mr. Nayeb-i Kabir, was active in the anti-Bahai movement, and often spoke about the anticipated Mahdi (see below). He was blunt and open about all matters. I remember the day he spoke about puberty and sexual impurity: he began with the phrase "la haya'a fi al-din" ("there should be no shame in religion") which allows one to discuss matters in public that otherwise are private. When he started to discuss masturbation and

illicit sexual intercourse not merely as a sin and cause of impurity to the self, requiring full ritual ablutions in cold water, but also as a contaminating source of pollution to anything touched, thereby voiding the prayers of others who thought they were praying in a pure place, many faces turned white. The following day many of the class went together for a ritual bath. There was a rumor that Kabir, a bachelor, was homosexual and liked young boys, and although I never had any evidence of this, he did have a maternal uncle with a shop near the school who was well-known for such activities. While maintaining an outward pious facade, this uncle sold cheap calligraphy pens to the boys and subtly would proposition them. (Later, I heard from Vaziri, that Nayib Kabir remaining a bachelor had something to do with his two elder sisters never marrying because their father refused to entertain suitors.)

The algebra instructor, Mr. Abqari, a former school superintendant, was both entertaining and feared, and with this combination was able to cajole his students to real excellence. He had all sorts of mathematical tricks to display; and at the same time never feared punishing students, even those bigger than he. I have a memory of him jumping like a basketball player to slap the face of a tall student. Other teachers were less successful. The science teacher, Mr. Dehqan, a former high school principal in Taft

(the town just south of Yazd famed for its pomegranates), tried to brow beat us with his temper, and styled himself an expert kharchran ("donkey herder"), we being the donkeys. I used to draw caricatures of him, and was caught, and slapped deservedly. Least liked of all was a Mr. Ayatollahi, a religious scholar who wore the turban and cloak of the theologians, and led us in prayer. We would keep him bowed down during prayers always asking for more time to catch up, until once, impatient, he turned and cursed us (thereby nullifying the prayer), so he had to start all over.

To make money, I tutored a fifth grader at the Ramazani School in math. I tutored every night for half a toman a night; and I often also ate at the house of this family. There were seven children in Muhammad Majdzadeh's family, he being the eldest. I taught Muhammad and his incredibly beautiful, green-eyed, brown haired sister, Nasrin, aged ten, who took my heart away with her astonishing charm. Muhammad, at least, became an outstanding student.

It was during this first year at Afshar that I met Mr. Vaziri. On the anniversary of the death of Imam Ali (21 Ramadan 1385 Q; 24 Dey 1344 Sh.) I was one of several who gave a speech to a large crowd in an exercise to train students in public speaking. After the speech, I was introduced to Vaziri. He shook my hand warmly, kissed my

forehead, and gave me a book, which I still have, inscribed, "In the name of God, on Friday, the twenty-first of the blessed month of Ramadan, 1385, in the grand mosque of Yazd, Mr. Abedi, freshman student of the Ta'limat-e Islami, made a wonderful speech. This book is given for his studies. May he reach the highest stages of perfection. Sayyid Ali Muhammad Vaziri. 24 Dey '44." During the summer, I found a job at the Vaziri Library, the library attached to the Yazd Congregational Mosque (of which I will tell more below). Mr. Vaziri paid me one hundred tomans a month. This was both fun, and far better than working for my brother, who did not like me or I him, or with my father, whom I did not trust to let me have access to my wages. I continued to work at the library during the next school year.

The second year of high school was one of rebellion. A group of us established a secret society to rule the class and teachers. We wrote a wall newspaper in which we ridiculed the teachers. It would be put up on the wall of the school at seven-thirty a.m. by a student named Husayn Makki. He was on good terms with Hashem, the office boy and servant of Vaziri, who also ran a tea shop in the school for the teachers and for those students who had the money to pay. Husayn Makki was one of his regular customers. At eight-thirty, after most everyone had read the newspaper, the principal would angrily take it off the wall. We also

organized strikes and potato picnics. We created disturbances during prayer. Finally we were uncovered, lashed and given poor conduct grades.

That year I tutored a fellow classmate, Muhammad Akhavan Tabatabaai. His parents adopted me almost as a son. The father owned a gas station, and mother was a beautician. They bought me my first bicycle, and gave me some shirts and pants. They had three sons, and when the mother became pregnant she joked that if the baby were a daughter, I could marry her. I took her seriously and was disappointed when the child proved to be a fourth son. I used to eat dinner with them, and felt at home there.

That must have been the year -- I was about fourteen -- when one night I had a striking dream. I dreamt that I was on a small isolated island in the middle of an ocean. It was such a tiny island that it had room for no more than five or six persons. I lived here and was at home here. I was alone but not lonely. There was nothing on the island but a palm tree under which I sat and watched the waves. The sun shone above my head; it was warm and nice. I saw a girl, my age, the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She emerged only partly from the sea revealing beautiful breasts with brown nipples. Her shoulders were broad and white; her long dark hair covered her shoulders and came down to her breasts. By current standards, she was on the

fat side. Her thick pink lips seemed just to have been kissed. Her eyes -- no words can describe them. To say they were dark, large, and penetrating, decorated with long eyelashes and extended eyebrows, would be to compare them with the usual beautiful eyes of Iranian girls at the dawn of their puberty. All I can say is they were perfect. They had all I ever wanted to see in a pair of eyes. She began to speak with me, in what language and what we said, I do not know. I felt myself melting as she spoke. Suddenly she said it was time for her to go. I begged her not to leave, but she disappeared as quickly as she had come. I began to sing in an effort to bring her back. I was singing "I wish I could see my beloved again", when I heard my mother calling my name as she gently shook my shoulders saying, "Medhi, you are dreaming."

She began to pray and recite verses of the Qur'an. Under the dim light of the oil lamp, she resembled the girl in the dream. She asked me about the dream, but I refused to speak. The next day I kept seeing the face in the dream, appearing and disappearing. My mother was curious and concerned, and did not want me to keep the secret of the dream from her. I thought of concocting a story to get by her inquisitions, but I did not for two reasons. Those who lie about their dreams, we were taught, soon die (See Chapter 2, commentary on the Joseph story). Secondly, my

mother was too intelligent to believe a story her own child had fabricated. One day when I came back from school, she was sewing. Behind her glasses she suddenly burst into tears, begging me to tell her my dream. Nothing, she said, is more embarrassing than sex, but dreams are dreams. Strange things happen in dreams. Bad dreams often have good meanings. Tell me, I am worried about your health. So she persuaded me, and after I told her, she said it was a wonderful dream, nothing to be ashamed of, in fact I had become a man by learning love. Then she began to instruct me about puberty and ritual purity, that one should take a ritual bath after a wet dream. (I think now that my dream was not of that sort, but that it was a premonition of my life: the bitter story of my homelessness, an unquenchable thirst in search of a lost love, the story of a village boy on his way to Tehran, Europe and the U.S. When two years later I read Sadeq Hedayat's "The Blind Owl" I experienced a powerful recognition scene.)

During the summer I again worked at Vaziri library. I was tired of school, and decided not to return. Vaziri agreed to let me stay on at the library at a somewhat higher salary of 150 tomans a month. I found I still wanted to study, and at the end of the school year I took the final exam for the ninth grade, and did reasonably well. Now that I was allegedly working full-time, my father wanted more

contributions from me. He was too proud to say so, and instead would make his will known indirectly: he always was angry at me and cursing at me. Finally, I decided to move out and live by myself: a new phenomenon in our world for a teenager. I was fifteen. My father was happy to let me go, thinking I would find out how hard it was to do without him. No one would rent a room to me, a young man not under the control of his family. I went to Mr. Vaziri for help, and wonder of wonders, it turned out that Afgshar High School was moving to a new location and needed someone to watch the building. He recommended I live in a room in the school, which I did.

That year I barely passed my final exams: I no longer wanted to study, and was thinking about getting married. If I was able to live alone, there was no reason I should not have a wife. This posed problems: I was embarrassed to ask my parents and friends who would laugh at me. Yet I had been taught it was a religious duty to get married as soon as sexual desire became uncontrollable. Masturbation was forbidden and believed to be harmful to health; I was too pious to seek out prostitutes; and women who were available for temporary marriages were too costly, probably older and not so attractive, and embarrassing were I to be caught. While I was studying for these exams I met Abbas, a carpet seller's assistant, who was also studying for the exams.

We studied together at night under the street lamps on Soraya Street. He knew of a beautiful widow, about thirty-five, who had several children, with whom a number of his friends had sexual experiences. So one mid-night we knocked at her door. Abbas knew how to knock, loud enough for her to wake up, and soft enough not to wake her children. She came out and immediately understood what we wanted. Some nights later we invited her for the whole night, and Abbas brought her to my grandfather's vacant house after midnight, so neighbors sleeping on the rooftops would not notice. At her recommendation we read the temporary marriage formula. For some reason we did not see her again after this. And a few months later Sayyid Ahmad Iskhevari, a cleric in his forties, arrived from Iraq and facilitated my marriage.

There was, however, an interesting political sequel to this story, in which she served unwittingly as a cover. Abbas and I continued to study together under the street lamps of Soraya Street, and a mutual friend, Hasan Montazer, persuaded us to distribute, late at night when the streets were deserted, copies of Khomeini's Hokumat-i Islami ("Islamic Government" -- viz. chapter 2). He got the copies from his brother, an activist, in Tehran, Muhammad Montazer. We hid the books in the alley, and began to study. We had prepared for the eventuality of dealing with

the policeman whose beat included Soraya Street by purchasing some foreign filter cigarettes, Marlboros. We knew he loved these cigarettes, but Abbas did something particularly stupid: when the policeman came around, he said, if you go "seven steps away from the king's palace" (i.e., if you leave us alone), you can have the whole pack. This was really tempting fate, but it worked. The policeman smiled and said, "Sure, I know what you fellows want to do." And he took off. We hurriedly slipped the copies of Khomeini's little book under doors in the neighborhood, giving priority, as Hasan had directed, to those in whose house we knew there were literate people and ones likely to be sympathetic. When the police returned some three hours later, we were again engaged in our studying, and he asked, "Well, how was she?" And we replied, laughing under our breath at the double entendre, "Great," meaning of course that we were tickled to be screwing and exposing the Government. (Such was the ribald idiom that was popularly used for anti-government activities.) We got away with our lark, but three weeks later Hasan was arrested, and then another friend, Mehdi Mehrizi. Hasan went to jail for eighteen months. I ran into him again a few years later in Tehran. After the revolution he became a writer and journalist, working for Keyhan-i Farhangi; he was killed in a car accident with his children. His brother, Muhammad,

the head of the Mujaheddin-i Engelabi Islami (not to be confused with the Mujaheddin-i Khalq) was killed during the American rescue mission on the desert outside Tabas.

Muhammad was blond and blue-eyed. One story is that the government forces mistook him for an American and shot him; the other version is that he seized documents with the names of collaborators from the disabled helicopter and was shot by the Americans; either way, both he and the alleged documents "turned to ash in Tabas".

Marriage

Sayyid Ahmad Ishkavari, a cleric in his forties, who had served as the librarian at Ayatullah S. Muhsin al-Hakim's library in Najaf for many years, had moved in with me. When he arrived in Yazd, he went to Vaziri. Vaziri, being too old and too ill to give him hospitality in his own house, sent him to "my house" with a male servant who proved to be a good cook. Ishkavari was a tall skinny man, with black turban, and thick glasses. He of course spoke both Arabic and Persian, and had beautiful hand-writing. He rarely laughed, but a smile constantly played on his face; he had a good sense of humor and was fond of talking about sex. He was married to an Iraqi woman, Batul, and had several children; he especially spoke often of his son, Muhammad. He had come to Yazd to find a job before bringing his family. He had gone first to Qum,

and had been directed to come to Yazd. He was not really an 'alem, not having studied fiqh, but he wore clerical gharb. He had started not unlike myself, as a bookbinder and manuscript cataloguer, becoming quite expert at identifying manuscripts. Vaziri was delighted to have him work on the manuscripts in the library, and for six months he was happy to help out. He then returned to Iraq to sell his house, fetch his family, and then he returned to Iran. He returned to Qum, rather than to Yazd, being offered a job in the larger library of Ayatullah Marashi, which was also able to pay him more than Vaziri, where our paths would cross again briefly in 1975, and where he still works today.

He was one of those who were beginning to feel the pressure of the Ba'thist government in Iraq, increasingly hostile to its Iranian residents. Shi'ites of Iranian descent had felt discomfited ever since the fall of King Faisal. Faisal's Minister of Culture had been Sayyid Hebad-ud-din Shahrestani, a blind Iranian Shi'ite mujtahed. Since the fall of Faisal, Shi'ites had not again gained exalted positions, and under the Ba'th religious Shi'ites felt oppressed by the secularism of the regime. Though settled in Iraq, these Iranians refused to behave as Iraqi nationals, e.g., they refused to serve in the military. As friction between the Shah's imperial policies and Iraq intensified, the Iranians became even less welcome to the

Iraqi authorities. Ishkavari's family was from northern Iran, but he considered himself Iraqi. He was a follower of Ayatullah Hakim, while I was a youthful enthusiast for Ayatullah Khomeini. I asked him if he had seen Khomeini.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "He is a very handsome man with much ambition. But he is very dangerous because he is controlled by the so-called revolutionaries in his entourage. They show him a map of Iran with red dots marking oil and mineral locations, and he asks, 'Why don't we control those?' I'll never forget his clash with Imam Hakim. Three days after he arrived in Najaf [in 1964 after being expelled from Iran to Turkey the previous year], the students of Hakim asked him to pay a visit to Khomeini. Hakim replied that Khomeini was younger and had the duty to pay his elder a visit first. A few days later, Hakim was told there was a rumor that unless he paid a visit to Khomeini, someone would pull off his turban in public. The peaceful Hakim decided to submit to the demand. When the two finally met, Khomeini said to him, 'If I had as many followers as you, I would rise up against the tyrants.' Hakim replied: 'Imam Ali had two sons, Hasan and Husain, each with a different strategy. Hasan's strategy was that of patience and of allowing the oppressive caliph Mu'awiyya to expose his illegitimacy to the people through his evil acts; Husain's strategy was that of rising against Yazid

[the son and successor of Mu'awiyya].' Khomeini responded: 'If Hasan ahad had as many followers as you, he too would have risen up. Hakim sagely replied: 'Only on the day of battle ~~they parted after having convinced the other.~~ ~~one has~~ (in 'those days I agreed with Khomeini. The youths of my generation thought of compromise and quietism as cowardise and treason.)

During the month of Ramadhan, Ishkivari and I spent more time together, and spent more time talking about sex. Finally one night I confessed toat I wanted to get married to protect my morals and religion. But, I lamented, people said I was too young, I still did not have a beard, and I was too poor, prosepective grooms always are asked whether they have a house and good salary. Ishkavari replied that I was old enough, that I had become a man the day prayers became obligatory for me, and that it is God who supplies house and daily bread. Perhaps, he suggested, I might find a rich father-in-law. He pointed out that when he himself had married, he had had nothing. And he proposed to speak to Mr. Vaziri.

A few days later, early in the morning, when I went to write a few letters for Mr. Vaziri (who was losing his vision), Vaziri asked me how old I was. "Seventeen," I replied. "You look older," he said, and then: "You are my son. I am too old. I am afraid I will die before you

marry." "May you live many more years," I fervently replied. Indeed I really loved Vaziri, so much so, that one night after he had become ill and told me he knew the date of his death, I took a ritual bath and prayed to God that He take half my life and give it to Vaziri." Some nights later I dreamt that Vaziri had died, and a crowd had assembled in the Congregational Mosque for his funeral. Among the theologians standing in a line to one side, I spied Khomeini. I went up to him and said, 'My master, do you see, God took Vaziri away from us.' 'Not at all,' replied Khomeini, 'because of your prayer, God had granted him a few more years.'" I told Vaziri about the dream. He cried and embraced me and kissed me on the forehead.

In any case, to finish the story of the conversation about marriage, Vaziri assured me that we need not wait. I said I had not seriously thought of marriage, but only recently had been talking to Iskhavari. "Yes, I know," he replied, "but who is the girl who writes you love letters?" "No one writes me love letters." "But Mr. Ishkavari has seen them." With a shock, I realized that Ishkavari had been going through my things and had read letters from my cousin, Rakhshandah. I told Vaziri it was a misunderstanding, this was an older cousin, and it was not love in that sense. So he asked who among the girls I liked. I said I did not know anyone. "None of the girls who

tutored in math and geometry?" he asked. "I never thought of them as potential wives," I replied. What a lie! There was Nasrin Majdzadah, whom I worshipped, but she was from a high status family. There was also Tahirah Talsaz, the daughter of the janitor at the Congregational Mosque; I tutored her brother, Ali, and she brought us tea. I never had actually seen her, since she came veiled, and only knocked at the door with the tea, at which Ali would go to take the tray from her. I only could guess that she must look like Ali. In other words, my love for her was an Islamic one. There was also Susan Mashruteh, the girl next door, and a distant relative, whom I had tutored: she was beautiful, but much too liberal for me; her veil was too thin, and she allowed part of her hair to show.

Vaziri asked me to ask my father to come see him. My older brother was sent instead. My mother then questioned me, and I gave her a list of girls. I began telling people I was getting married, and they tried to dissuade me, saying I should finish my education, and that for sex I should go to Qum and get a sighthah (temporary marriage). A few days later, when I went to tutor Ali, I saw Tahirah without a veil: she was washing tea glasses, and when I entered the compound, she jumped up, asking God for forgiveness and ran behind a tree. Was it a set up, to let me see her? One look at a girl one will marry is considered okay by Islamic

convention, and such looks are often arranged. That day Ali and I did more talking about my marriage plans than math, and after our session, I went straight to my mother and told her I definitely wanted Tahireh. She was beautiful with long dark brown hair, lovely eyes and eyebrows, well proportioned. My mother agreed with me: she had seen her in the public baths. That night I dreamed of Tahireh. But the next day my mother, giving me a compassionate look from behind her sewing machine, said she could find someone better. She told me that my older brother was adamantly opposed to Tahireh, saying we might be poor, but we were the descendants of Haj Muhammad Karim Isfahani, and could not have the daughter of a janitor in the family. I became angry but she said to be patient: destiny is always made by God. My brother proposed a distant relative, but her father rejected the idea on the grounds that I had not yet done my military service. Then my brother remembered his friend and client, Sha'ban the coppersmith, had a daughter, whom he had seen ten years earlier as a cute four or five year old. My mother went to see her, and forty-eight hours later I was married.

Vaziri presided at the marriage, and in his benedictory speech, he recounted the marriages of the Prophet and of the Imams one by one to the twelfth, ending, and now is the time of the marriage of one whose name is the same as the twelfth

Imam. Then he announced that the groom had no house, and thank God, the father-in-law had a big one, and so the groom would live there. So I lived with my father in law for four years, when I left in a dispute over a piece of land. I had been paying my father in law for this land, but he registered it in his own name.

Anjuman-i Dhidd-i Baha'iyat (The Anti-Baha'i Society)

[The Anti-Baha'i organization was started with the permission of Ayatullah S. Husain Borujerdi by Shaikh Mahmud Halabi of Mashhad who became what in contemporary idiom might be called a "Mahdi freak". He started an annual celebration in Mashhad of the Mahdi's birthday, in which everyone who owned canaries would bring them in their cages to decorate a large husainiyeh in which the celebration was held. He also started an organization to stop the spread of Baha'ism which claimed that Muhammad was not the last and final prophet, but that a new dispensation had begun with Baha'ullah. The organization was called Anjuman-i Imam-i Zaman so as to deny any claim that the Bab or Baha'ullah could be considered the Mahdi or messiah. After the 1979 Revolution, it Arabicized its name to Hojatiyya after the title of the Imam-i Zaman, Hojat-ul-Islam. Halabi moreover hinted that he was in daily contact with the Imam-i Zaman: and eventually he came out against Khomeini, denying that he was a legitimate representative of the Imam-i Zaman. The

name Hojjatiyya thus now performed two denials: first, the Babi-Baha'i claim that the Imam Zaman had come or that there was a new dispensation; second, Khomeini's title Naye-b-i Imam or Imam (Aide to the Imam, or Imam). Halabi invoked the slogan "Should any flag be raised before the coming of the Mahdi, its carrier is an idolator (taghut) and is guilty of the heresy of shirk (worshipping something other than God)." Halabi advocated peaceful means of fighting the Bahais, including harrassment, but not direct insult or violence. Violence against the Baha'is however has broken out on several occasions during this century: 1903 in Yazd, 1955-56 in nearby Abarghu, the 1979 Revolution are times of martyrdom for Baha'i history (on the former two, see Fischer 1973: appendix on religious riots; on the latter, see Fischer 1980).

In Yazd the Anti-Baha'i Society was headed by Dr. Paknejad, a physician on government salary, who also owned a weaving factory. His office was devoted more to the Anti-Baha'i Society than to healing patients, although he often wrote out free prescriptions for the poor. He wrote a series of some fifteen volumes on Islam and medicine, called Akharin Daneshgah va Avvalin Peyghambar (The First University and the Last Prophet), which is a badly written and confused outpouring of verbiage with little value or coherence. After the Revolution he was elected to

parliament from Yazd. He was assassinated, and replaced as Majlis representative by Ayatullah Saduqi's son.

A number of Baha'is of Yazd were killed during the Revolution. The most dramatic of these stains on the Revolution was the execution of Nurullah Akhtar-Khavari (see Fischer), the gentle, educated, cosmopolitan leader of the Yazdi Baha'is, who handled international correspondence for the Derakhshan Textile Mill. He had given Paknejad private tutorials in English. Paknejad not only repaid this with dilligent harrassment of the Baha'is, but made no move to avert the execution of his teacher. That execution was filmed for television by the zealots of the Revolution only to discover that audiences were repulsed, and the broadcast was suppressed. Paknejad now has a small street named after him, as if he were a worthy martyr.]

It was Mr. Nayeab Kabir, the geometry and religion teacher mentioned above, who prepared us for ideological combat against the Baha'is, whom he referred to as "the political party". He stressed the verse in the Qur'an which refers to Muhammad as khatam al-nabiyin ("the seal of the Prophets") (33:40), and he prepared us for the Baha'i argument that while khatim means "the last", khatam, the form here, means "signet ring"; from this the Baha'is drew the conclusion that there were other "seals" of prophecy, while Mr. Kabir insisted that the Qur'an means Muhammad was

the seal that closes prophethood. He also prepared us for the Baha'i argument that nabi is only one of several kinds of prophets, and that rasul and ulu al-azm are other kinds. But one cannot be a rasul without being a nabi, and one cannot be an ulu al-azm without being both nabi and rasul. And he dealt with the problem of the supernaturally long life of the Mahdi: born in 255/868 he had already lived eleven centuries, and would live to the end of time. Here he would tell us about others who had lived long lives, like Noah; he told us there were contemporaries who had seen the Mahdi; and he said that modern biology had demonstrated that cells could live forever if properly nourished. The last fit nicely with the dogma that all the Imams had been assassinated, for had their lives not been precipitously ended, they would have lived forever. He taught us the signs of the Mahdi's reappearance, and he had ready answers to objections such as why would the Mahdi return with a sword and only 313 followers, would not a few atomic bombs be more efficient. The answer was that in a sword there is wisdom, while atomic bombs kill guilty and innocent alike, leaving no opportunity for verbal persuasion, to recant, and join the forces of the Mahdi. His forces will not be limited to 313, but many will join: may we all be his soldiers.

I did not know much about Baha'is before this time.

Children in the alleys would sometimes chant, "Tu pir-e babi ridam" ("I shit on the Babi saint"), and my father had told me that "Babis" (he did not distinguish Babis and Baha'is) did not say their prayers, and were najes (impure). In the village, the first Sepah-i Danesh (literacy corpsman) had been taunted and run out with accusations that he was Baha'i (though that may have had to do mainly with his obvious disinterest in the village, and always running off to town).

My father had already often spoken to me about the Mahdi. One of his few books, which he seemed never to tire of reading, was a volume called Nur al-Anwar (The Light of the Lights). It described the Mahdi, the signs of his reappearance, the names, number and place of origin of those destined to be among his special 313 soldiers. My father would sigh, "Alas, I am not one of those soldiers, since none of them come from Yazd." He also had a small book by a mullah named Khalisi, called "Crime in Abarquh", the story of a Baha'i who had killed some Muslims with an ax. The book called on Muslims to rise up for justice. It inflamed people like my father, and youths, like myself to think of Baha'is as merciless killers; and I remember after having read it, I had nightmares of a Baha'i trying to kill me with an ax. My father liked to tell me the stories of the year of Baha'i killing (sal-i babi kushi)[presumably 1905, see Fischer 1973: appendix on religious riots], as if he,

single handedly had killed Baha'is like so many flies or mosquitoes. The verb he used was saqqat kardan, the term for slaughtering animals. Of course, I knew this was all vicarious bravado: he had never killed anyone in his life.

Nayeb Kabir's approach was different. He did not share the pride of the earlier generations in having physically killed Baha'is. Instead he thought the spread of Bahaism could be halted, bringing the misguided back to Islam, by training Muslim youths to challenge the Baha'i missionaries (muballighs). He had a network of spies who had penetrated Baha'i circles by pretending to be believers. Part of their job was to find people in the process of being attracted to Bahaism, or merely curious, and reconvert them back to Islam. I was recruited and attended weekly meetings of the Anjuman-i Dhid-i Baha'i in a room attached to the Congregational Mosque just across from the old Vaziri Library, belonging to the Heyat-i Homiyun-i Masjid-i Jama' (the Gathering of Protectors of the Congregational Mosque). I seemed to be the only student in these meetings; everyone else was from the bazaar, except two teachers, Nayeb Kabir from the secondary school of the Talimat-i Islami, and Mir Ali from the primary school of the Talimat-i Islami. There were several such groups of ten or fifteen persons each under the general leadership of Dr. Paknejad. Among ourselves the organization was called Anjuman-i Dhid-i

Baha'i, but to outsiders we called it Anjoman-i Imam-i Zaman (Society of the Imam of the Age).

These meetings consisted in part of dictations by Nayeb-i Kabir, which we would copy into notebooks of arguments to use with the Baha'is, and quotations from their own writings complete down to page and line numbers. But the exciting part were practice debates in which one of us would play the role of the Baha'i. Soon I was completely preoccupied with Baha'ism. I read all the refutations of Baha'ism I could find. Nayib Kabir and these books told me about the connection between Baha'ism and colonial politics, that the Russians had invented Shaykhism and its offshoot, Babism; that Baha'ism was an offshoot of Babism supported by the British, and more recently by the Zionists. (Khalisi, the author of the pamphlet about Abarquh, had also published the memoirs of Prince Dalgorgi, the Russian who was supposed to have started Babism, by going to Sayyid Kazem Rashti, the head of the Shaykhis, and suggesting to him that the Mahdi might be among us, and pointing out the Bab. Khalisi, was exiled to Yazd by the Shah.)

Once, in Dr. Paknejad's presence, I played the Baha'i, and defeated all my fellow Muslim's efforts to break through my responses. This ranged from glib adolescent nonsense to much more dangerous areas. Thus I was charged, "Baha'ullah is your God," and instead of denying this and insisting on

precision, that he was but a prophet of God, I went on the attack, saying suppose it is so, what then? They charged, it says in your books that he had a hernia, how could God be so powerless as not to be able to cure his own hernia? To this I glibly responded, at the beginning of your Muslim prayer you say "Allah o Akbar" ("God is the Greatest"); if God is the greatest, then his testicles must be the greatest. Everyone laughed good-humoredly. But when I began to argue the case for pantheism and metaphor, and cited the Qur'anic verse where God says to Allah, "It was not you who shot the arrow, but Allah . . .", things became tense, and Paknejad stopped the proceedings, saying, "Thank God, you are Muslim; were you really a Baha'i, not even Muhammad himself could convince you." Another person said, "If someone were as hard-headed as you, it could never be the word of Muhammad that could change your mind, but only the sword of the Mahdi."

In these debates we were taught to be polite, to differentiate ourselves from the rabble who cursed the Baha'is. Baha'is were pacifist, so we had no fear of being beaten, and we wanted to show we also had a mission to be as peaceful as they, and to demonstrate that we had a higher logic. Our goal was not so much to win verbal duels, but to intervene with Muslims who were toying with Baha'i propaganda and bring them back into the fold of Islam. We were

infiltrated into Baha'i meetings under the guise of ourselves being potential converts. Often, of course, Baha'is we engaged in conversation would ask, do you know Dr. Paknejad, and we would say, no I have nothing to do with him. We were also taught to snatch rare Baha'i books where we could. Two or three incidents in which I participated will illustrate the tactics.

Kamran was a young Baha'i pointed out to me, whom I befriended. We got to the point where we said to each other, "If I can show you the truth, will you accept it", and each of us said "yes". He brought me a mimeographed book, which I read and was somewhat impressed by. So I took it to the meeting of the Anjoman-i Zhid-i Baha'i, and as soon as I began describing its arguments, it was identified and the counter arguments laid out. Nayeb Kabir told me it was not an important book and I should return it to Kamran. Some time later, Kamran gave me a rare edition of the Iqtan (Certitude), published in Cairo. When I showed this to Paknejad, he checked it and recognized it as the original unedited version, and appropriated it. Kamran tried mightily to persuade me to give it back, arguing that were he to have done the same to me, I would never accept his religion; that I was clearly not acting on my own conscience but was being manipulated by others; and that he had borrowed it to show me only with great difficulty arguing

that I was an educated and sincere friend. I remained unmoved, and pointed out that the book was no longer in my hands, but that it now belonged to the library of the Imam Zaman.

It was perhaps Kamran who took me to the one Baha'i meeting I ever infiltrated. I remember that there was a Baha'i missionary from Tehran who answered questions of the local Baha'i, and there was one local very agitated man who asked how to respond to questions about the Baha'i calendar having an illogical 19 months, while all other religions had twelve months aligned with the solar or lunar calendars. The missionary responded that were the questioner Muslim, one could cite the Quran'ic "bismillah rahman-i rahim" which has nineteen letters, and several other phrases which were multiples of nineteen, i.e. that nineteen is a divine number. The man in a crude Yazdi idiom retorted, *kos che rapti be shaghigre darad* ("what connection does the vagina have with the temples?; the Tehran idiom is *"guz che rapti . . ."*, "what connection does a fart have . . ."). So the missionary replied: nineteen times nineteen is 351 days, plus four days we celebrate, what's so bad about that? Another item of discussion I remember was that the Baha'i library in the village of Manshad did not have a copy of the *Dehkhoda* encyclopedia, and money should be raised to supply one. This impressed me because at the time, the Vaziri

Library was trying to find someone to donate this encyclopedia, and I thought to myself this village library must be large to have things our library did not. But later I realized that the Baha'is had a special interest in this encyclopedia because it had a long entry on the Bab. The entries on the Imams were rather short, understandably since Iranian knows about them, but much to the anger of Muslim zealots like Dr. Paknejad.

The only other evil thing I did against individual Baha'is was when I was transferred to a second group of the Anjoman under Ahmad Fattahi. Fattahi was a registrar of births and deaths. It was he who registered most Baha'i marriages, births and deaths, so he was a tremendous source of information in keeping tabs on Baha'is. (Technically Baha'i marriages were not recognized and could only be registered as marriages under the four recognized religions: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism.) One day Fattahi called me. I had a beard and a black suit, and he gave me a black attache case. He took me to an alley in the Zoroastrian Quarter, and told me to knock on a particular door and ask for Abbas. Abbas would not be there. I was to pretend I was an anti-Baha'i activist from Tehran asked by Abbas to come and answer questions he was not capable of answering. Whether or not I was admitted into the house, I was to deliver the message that they should not think what

they were doing was secret, but that we knew everything that went on. When I knocked, a woman's voice with a Zoroastrian accent answered without opening the door, "Who is it?"

"Engineer Imami," I said. "What do you want (che farmayeshi darid?)," she asked in polite formal language, adding, "Our man is not here (mardimun khuneh nist)", i.e., please go away. "I'm looking for Abbas." "What Abbas? No Abbas lives here." "Abbas, you know, the painter."

Silence. I repeated, "Abbas, the painter who comes here to learn from your husband." "He is not here." "He must be here; he sent for me to come all the way from Tehran to answer a few questions. Where shall I go? When will your husband or Abbas be here?" Suprisingly, at this point, the woman opened the door a little, and spoke loudly as if invoking the ears of neighbors, "I already told you, Abbas is not here, my husband is not here." I said, "Tell Abbas if he sends for someone from Tehran, he must be polite enough to meet them." And I turned and walked away.

Fattahi was waiting with his bicycle and took me on it back to his office. There I reported the conversation and asked him what it was all about. Abbas, he said was a poor painter, who had been seen repeatedly in the shop of this Zoroastrian-Baha'i tailor. The ruse worked: when Abbas next went to the house, he was turned away despite his protestation that he did not know any Engineer Imami. A few

days later Fattahi sent someone else to Abbas to hire him to paint a house. As the contract was being made, this emissary asked, "You are not a Baha'i or a Jew are you; paint after all is a liquid and conveys impurity, we cannot use a najes painter." "No, no," Abbas assured him. Then later while painting, the emissary said, "Sorry, I asked you, but you know these Baha'is are such hypocrites and liars." And with such preparation, often an Abbas would spill his own story out of bitterness. So, Fattahi said, we turn potential enemies of the Mahdi into soldiers of the Mahdi.

That is what we called ourselves, sarbaz-i Imam-i Zaman (soldiers of the Imam of the Age). It was a kind of war. Perhaps that is why many of the leaders of the Anjoman were not married: Nayeb Kabir, Mir Ali, Fattahi. No one in the organization was a mullah, because clerical dress would warn off any Baha'is. The only one who wore a turban was Shaikh Mahmud Halabi of Mashhad who started the whole thing.

The Sage in the Library: Vaziri

Vaziri was like a second father to me: he gave me my first job in his library, attached to the Friday Mosque; he helped arrange my marriage; and he provided a model of public service to me. He not only built up a modern library, with one of the finest manuscript collections in Iran, but he rennovated the decaying Friday Mosque, and was

instrumental in reviving the Friday communal prayers in Yazd. Although in some respects he was as enmeshed in the conservative religious ideology of Yazd as the other leading cleric, Sadduqi, he was more tolerant and open-minded. His life story, which I got to know well over the years, is not only inherently interesting, but a central part of Yazd's development in the past half century.

Vaziri was a serious theological student in Yazd as a youth, but as it happened, he never progressed further in the theological curriculum than Arabic grammar; he never even got to jurisprudence. He was very poor, and to make a living, he started doing pa membari: i.e. he was the warm-up act before the main sermon in the mosque or at a rowzeh. The pa membari, usually someone with a good voice, would stand or sit on the first or second step of the membar and recite religious poetry. Vaziri was good looking, tall, thin, blue eyes, and he had a silver tongue. One day the daughter and wife of Afsar ul-Mulk (a court poet and noble associated with Muzaffaruddin Shah) were in the audience; the daughter fell in love with him. The family, after some debate, decided that although he was poor, he was talented, a sayyid, and from a noble genealogy going back to a vazir of Shah Yahya. (Vaziri's ancestors came from Urayd, a village near Medina in Saudi Arabia; they were sayyids, descendants of the prophet; and they had served as vazirs to

the rulers of Yazd, hence the family name.) They sent a woman go-between to Madrassa Khan where Vaziri was living. As he tells the story, an amusing exchange occurred.

There is a knock on his room door late one night, and when he opens it, he sees an old woman who asks if he would like to marry. Naturally he thought she was proposing a *sigheh* (temporary) marriage. He says no thank you, and starts to close the door. She hastily says, "Wait, sometimes there is a fortune at your door; don't be so quick to let it go." Vaziri becomes angry: "You call yourself a fortune?" "No, no, you have misunderstood me: I'm not offering myself; I am here to encourage you to ask for the hand of the daughter of Afsar al-Mulk" Vaziri becomes even angrier; he thinks he is being mocked: "Me a poor talabeh marrying the daughter of Afsar ul-Mulk! *Del-e man susundi* ("you've seared by heart, may God burn your heart"). "What can I do to convince you?" she says. "Go to hell," he replies. She leaves, but is sent back the following evening with some bags of gold, and says to him, if you think poverty is the barrier, here take these and ask for her hand; they will give her to you." And so, Vaziri sends one of his teachers to Afsar ul-Mulk, and receives the answer, "Why not."

On the one hand the story resembles that of the Prophet who married a rich woman; on the other hand it is like the

ditty that warns talabehs that if they marry their studies will suffer. (Zobh-i hal 'ilm fi furuq al-nasakh, "knowledge is slaughtered in the vagina"). So it was with Vaziri: his studies came to a halt, but with his new wealth and name, he is popular and turns his energies to public service. This was a time when the Baha'is were very active and taunting the Muslims that their decaying mosques were signs of the decay of their religion, that a new dispensation was coming to replace Islam. Vaziri happened to lose his voice, and it was rumored that this was due to poisoning by the Baha'is who feared his silver tongue would help revive Islam. When he regained his voice, he went on the membar, and began to preach: "the Bahais say Islam is dying, that its death is symbolized in our decaying mosques. Let's show them." Every Friday he would go on the membar and make an appeal for money, and women would throw their jewelry at him. (Very much the same mode of donation happened during the 1979 revolution.) As soon as he began the project, of course, the government offices of archeology and public works showed up to support and give instructions. (The original mosque had been completed in 777/1375, allegedly on the site of an old Zoroastrian fire temple.) There is a story that one of government engineers approached the Imam Jama'h to ask him to help raise money for the project. The Imam Jama'h said, no problem, I need not raise

money, it is available: just tell the government I said they should spend the khums on this good act. (I.e., he was sarcastically referring to the Islamic tax on surplus income that should be collected by Islamic governments for public projects.)

Vaziri also arranged to have electricity put into the mosque. It was operated by a Zoroastrian, an English speaking (probably he had been to Bombay), employee of the Zoroastrian who brought the first electricity to Yazd, a man we called Gowr Cheragh-e Barghi (gowr was a derogatory term for Zoroastrians. This engineer of the mosque's electricity worked in a room attached to the mosque, but not in it.

Vaziri was also the one who revived the practice of communal prayers in Yazd. (On the debate among Shi'ites whether namaz-i jama'h is prohibited during times of illegitimate government or until the return of the Mahdi, whether it is required as the Qur'an originally intended, or whether it is a meritorious act in a predominantly Shi'ite community, see Ch. 2). There was little point in restoring the Friday mosque, if one did not also revive Friday prayers. At first it was difficult to get people to come. A produce seller (sabzi-forush) used to station himself at the gate and tell people, we are going to have namaz-i jama'h, we need a quorum of five, please join us. This was in the 1920s.

Most importantly, Vaziri began a modern library. This caused some resistance at first among some of the clerics. They did not like the fact that he was introducing Western style tables and chairs, nor that he was taking away "for preservation" theological manuscripts endowed for the active use of theological students in the madrassa system. Vaziri brushed aside the objections, pointing out that now there were printed editions of these fragile manuscripts. Vaziri was very good at getting people to donate furniture and books and manuscripts. After a while, some people began to joke and call him Shah-i Gedahha, King of the Beggars, because whenever Vaziri saw you he would ask for donations. The first library was established with a thousand one hundred books in 1334/1955 in a room adjacent to the mosque; the room originally was a mausoleum where Vaziri's father was buried, as well as where the previous imam of the mosque was buried. Ten years later when the next imam died, there was pressure to bury him in the same place, and to return the room into being a mausoleum. Fortunately, by this time, Vaziri had already arranged for a new library building, on a site outside one of the mosque gates, on land that had primarily been used as a public toilet. There were by now some twenty thousand books. The new building was donated by a Yazdi industrialist, Muhammad Herati (he was later executed in the Islamic Revolution). When I began working

in the library, it was still being moved into its new quarters, and I together with the just retired head librarian were in charge of ordering the books on the shelves. There were four staff: the head librarian was a former school teacher, who read little, and depended for his knowledge on what people orally told him the books were about; Shaykh Ali was a theology student and regarded all books on subjects other than Islam worthless; Sayyid Mustafa was a manuscript expert who was good at letting us know whether an author was Sunni or Shi'ite.

My official title was book binder, although I was something of a jack of all trades in the library, and also served as a secretary to Mr. Vaziri. The book binding room gave me some privacy to read books that were otherwise forbidden. There were three categories of books: those banned by the government (these I felt obligated to read since I thought they contained things the government was trying to hide from the public); those forbidden on what I thought still were justifiable religious grounds, books written to destroy Islam (in this category were the books of Govineau, of Kasravi, and the introduction to Nuqtat al-Kaf by E.G. Browne); those that were forbidden to the masses, but which I thought intelligent people like myself could handle (Hedayat's books were in this category). If people asked for these books, we said, "Manu' ast, nemidim" (It is

forbidden, we will not lend it). I remember saying this to someone when he asked for Hedayat's "Spring of Immortality," and then curious, beginning to read the book myself, and getting caught by the head librarian, who seized it, saying, "the books of Hedayat make people commit suicide." I was sixteen when I read Hedayat's 'The Blind Owl' for the first time: it was indeed a shattering experience, and I saw that Vaziri had written in his own hand on the cover the warning that it was not to be given out. Not only was "The Blind Owl" shattering because the sufferings of the narrator were so moving, nor only because the imagery powerfully recalled my dream of the girl on the island, but also because it opened my eyes to the numbing repetitions of everyday life, and left me in despair of the absurdity and meaninglessness of my life.

Vaziri collected books indiscriminately. I remember his son, a physician, used to donate old drug catalogues. I sometimes thought I should be given permission to weed out the junk. And once I asked Vaziri why if some books were so dangerous we did not burn them. The idea of burning books was abhorrent to Vaziri: it was the single most heinous crime he held against Ahmad Kasravi, much more than his criticism of Shi'ism and its clerics. I asked him whether books that misguided people had any positive use. First he said, they are useful for the scholars who refute them. But

when I replied, "No misguiding books, no need for refutation", he answered: "Books are like men; you hang a man without a proper trial, and he will become a martyr forever. You burn a book, and its fame becomes greater."

Vaziri was always delighted when foreigners came to visit: it was a way of validating his pride in having distinguished himself beyond other local clergymen, in having accomplished something which was admired by non-Muslims as well as Muslims, foreigners as well as Iranians. In fact, local Yazdis had relatively little interest in the library: they were craftsmen and factory workers and merchants. Most of the users of the library were high school students interested mainly in the math primers. So, foreigners provided a kind of visible support, and he was especially proud of visits of such celebrated scholars as the art historian Arthur Pope. It was through his concern to be hospitable to all foreign visitors that I met the third critical patron of my education.

Clerical Rivalry & Ayatullah Saduqi

[Ayatullah Muhammad-Ali Saduqi had been an aide to Ayatullah S. Husain Borujerdi before returning to Yazd to succeed Faqih Khorassani. He became Khomeini's representative in Yazd, and after the Revolution was Khomeini's representative for the southeastern region of Iran. His was the most authoritative voice to be raised in defense of the killing, jailing, and excluding from public service of Baha'is. After the Revolution he changed the site of where he led prayers from the Hazireh Mosque he had built, to the Masjid-i Mullah Ismail, the largest mosque in Yazd. He preferred this mosque to the Congregational Mosque partly because it was larger, partly because he did not directly wish to displace the Imam Jama' of Yazd although he was doing so indirectly, partly because the latter mosque had been repaired with "unclean" money of the Shah's government, and partly because he did not wish to add any luster to a mosque associated in the popular mind with Vaziri. It was in the Mullah Ismail Mosque that Saduqi was assassinated, captured fully on video tape by a crew that happened to be filming his activities. He was succeeded by his father-in-law, Ayatullah S. Abbas Khatani, a man with considerably less charisma but also less brutality than Saduqi. As one Yazdi put it, Saduqi was feared, Khatani is respected. Khatani happens to be an opium smoker, and a

story is told that a woman came to him to intercede for her husband who had been jailed for a small amount of opium possession by the Islamic government; Khatani summoned the chief of police, ostentatiously smoked an opium pipe in front of him and asked him to either jail him or release the other man for this minor crime. The man was released. Khatani says that opium is not prohibited by the Qur'an, and only smugglers should be jailed. Another Khatami story is that two men accused of a capital crime but not convicted sent a lawyer to intercede with him. He directed that the two dig their own graves, lie in them, and before a crowd of witnesses repent of their sins. The crowd was moved, and after this moral lesson, Khatami released the two men.]

Let me contrast Ayatullah Saduqi -- nobody referred to him as Ayatullah; he was called Hojat-ul-Islam; we did not have many ayatullahs in those days -- with Mr. Vaziri, and also with his predecessor, Shaikh Gholam Reza Khorassani, and with the Modaressis. Vaziri was a man of service, Saduqi a man of learning, trained in Qum. I knew Saduqi from childhood: I said my prayers behind him from age eight, and I remember at first when I stood directly behind him, he asked me to stand further back, since he thought I might not know the rules of purity. Later I served both as a mo'azen (caller to prayer) and as a mokaber (who tells the assembly when to bow, when to rise) at his mosque, the Hazireh

Mosque.

Part of the story of Saduqi I must tell from what my mother narrated to me: Saduqi as a child helped his paternal uncle in Yazd in a place called Hazireh, where the Hazireh Mosque is today, on the main street of Yazd just up from the clock tower at the end of the street leading to the Congregational Mosque and Vaziri Library. But in those days it was a gharib-khaneh, a place where poor visitors to Yazd could be given a room and food for a few days or weeks. It had been established as a charitable endowment many, many years ago. It contained a small mosque, where Saduqi's uncle led prayers, and Saduqi as a child would help out by calling people to prayer, and by reading du'a prayers before the namaz prayers. This uncle had, as my mother put it, an ugly daughter, who was older than Saduqi, and they gave her to Saduqi. Soon thereafter he left to study in Qum. There he proceeded through the ranks, and ended up becoming the treasurer to Ayatullah S. Husain Borujerdi (the head of the Qum theological center, and the leading ayatullah of Iranian Shi'ites). Saduqi had a nigh miraculous memory. He claimed, both to me and to news reporters, that his memory was so good that he was able to pay fourteen thousand theological students their monthly stipends without missing one and without giving one twice, all without any record keeping.

This went on until it was decided to run a son of Shaikh Abdol-Karim Haeri-Yazdi, the former leader of the Qum theological center, Mehdi Ha'eri-Yazdi, for parliament from Yazd. There were a few complications: e.g., Mehdi Ha'eri was not old enough to be a member of parliament, but that seemed not to matter. Saduqi was sent to Yazd to campaign for Mehdi Ha'eri-Yazdi. This is the period when Ahmad Kasravi mocked the mullahs, and this campaign was a perfect target: for years, noted Kasravi, the mullahs insisted that the Iranian government was illegitimate and one must not cooperate with it; now when they saw some room for them in it, they attempted to send one of their sons to parliament. Mehdi Ha'eri-Yazdi, lost the election. But something else happened.

The leading cleric of Yazd, Shaikh Gholam-Reza "Faqih Khorassani", died in a village some twelve farsakhs (seventy-two kilometers) from Yazd. People carried the body on their shoulders back to the city. There was perhaps some encouragement given to Saduqi that he should stay and succeed Khorassani, but Saduqi needed no encouragement. In Qum he was merely a treasurer to Borujerdi. Here was an opportunity to govern a town. So Saduqi stayed in Yazd. To comprehend his standing in Yazd, we need to compare him with Khorassani.

Faqih Khorassani is one of those names which will be

remembered for a long time in Yazd, particularly for his piety. He is the one we used as an example in the introduction to Khomeini's *Risaleh Tozih al-Masa'il* (Fischer and Abedi 1984: xv): he discovered his mother was not doing her prayer ablutions correctly, and feared she had never done them right, he undertook to repeat her namaz prayers for her entire eighty years worth, lest on account of ritual failure, she go to hell. People remember him for such piety, and in fact he really was free of love of worldly ambitions. Three or four times he sold his house, and spent the proceeds for theological students and the poor. Finally a rich man tricked him into a house: The story is that the rich man, after one of these episodes of selling the house, offered him a house to live in. After Faqih Khorassani had moved in, he said, "I give this house to you, you own it, but there is one condition, you may not sell it for as long as you live, and you must live in it." There is another story that a man came to him and said he needed some means to work. Faqih Khorassani asked what he did. "I have been a porter, but I am too old now to carry things." So Faqih Khorassani gave him his personal donkey, saying, "Take this, I do not need it, I can walk."

Faqih Khorassani is also fondly remembered for his outwitting of Reza Shah's decree that the clergy were forbidden to wear turbans. Faqih Khorassani dressed in the

gharb of a shepherd, with a felt cap, a big staff in hand, and giveh on his feet, with the backs of the giveh pulled up and a pa-pich wrapped around his legs. (Giveh are cotton slippers, usually worn with the backs turned down so one can slip them on and off easily when entering a room; the backs might be pulled up if one intends some serious walking. Pa-pich are wide ribbons of cloth wrapped around the legs as support stockings.) The symbolism was quite apt since prophets were always shepherds in Islamic tradition. People still enjoy talking about how Faqih Khorassani looked like a shepherd ruling over so many lambs in Yazd.

Saduqi, of course, was never able to take the place of Faqih Khorassani. He may have been more knowledgeable than Faqih Khorassani, but not as pious. Why not? The most important thing Saduqi did in Yazd, at least in the early part of his career, was to convert the Hazireh from being a hostel for strangers (gharib-khaneh) into a mosque. Many people objected and refused to say their prayers there on the grounds that the endowment and land had been illegitimately usurped. Saduqi argued that it was a tabdil be asan (replacing something with something better). He argued that the place had become an opium den and a place of prostitution, and that anyone could agree a house of God was better than a place of ill repute. But many thought that a proper tabdil be asan would have been to rebuild the gharib

khaneh in a modern attractive way, not eliminate the function for which it was endowed (on the legalities and politics of endowments, see Fischer 1980: 114-20). It was not as if Yazd lacked enough mosques.

The issue of the conversion of the Hazireh into a mosque was a useful tool in the hands of both the circle around Vaziri, and also the well-established clerical family called Modaressi. The Modaressis, as their name indicates, were modaress (teachers) of theology. They controlled, and still control, some of the theological schools of Yazd. The Modaressis always thought themselves superior to everyone else: they were called aghazadeh ("sons of great men"), they always sat at the highest place wherever they went, and they cultivated a look of disdain at ordinary folk as if they were wise men amid crowds of fools. They never accepted Saduqi as a religious authority in town. Financially they were quite well off: they had some land, even a few very small villages, I think. So they needed nothing from the town and were content with what they had: their role as teachers, and the endowments they controlled. They looked down upon both Vaziri and Saduqi, but there was a difference: Saduqi responded in kind, but Vaziri accepted that he was not on the same level of scholarship, and overlooked an occasional slight, preferring to maintain relations with the Modaressis. There also was an issue of

tolerance. The Modaressis had little truck with the liberals who supported Vaziri, and again Vaziri took no offence.

Vaziri was tolerant in the sense that if he knew that your daughters did not veil, or that you were working for the government, or that you spent your money in questionable ways, he cared, but he did not let it stand between you and himself as human beings. He still dealt with you, he would still allow you to use the library. Saduqi, by contrast, would not do that: he was very strict with those with whom he would deal.

Vaziri did not mind that he did not control any theological schools, a source of clerical prestige. He knew that he was not cut out for such a role; he was not trained and did not know how to teach. He was not interested in that sort of thing. But Saduqi was. And so Sadqui revived the Madrasseh Khan, an old theological school in the bazaar, to rival the Madresseh Musallah, run by the Modaressis. Eventually he also established a library, probably with the intention of rivaling Vaziri's Library, but it never got the fame of Vaziri's library, perhaps because the latter was not so "pious" about where it derived its support and clientele.

Let me tell you a story that can serve as a symbol of the situation. One day the Empress Farah came to Yazd. It would have been impossible to get Saduqi to go and welcome

her, but Vaziri met her. He even said things that caused her to smile. But he was also extremely courageous. The meeting was to last fifteen minutes; it went on for forty-five, and it was mainly Vaziri speaking, not the Empress asking questions. Then, I will never forget, Vaziri pointed to a grave which had just been discovered by the archeologists, and he said, "Here is the grave of a queen who ruled Yazd about a thousand years ago. From her there remains nothing except the good deeds she did for the people. If you want to live forever, you must emulate her." That took guts to say to the Empress. Earlier, at the beginning of their conversation, Vaziri said, "Your Majesty, you and I are cousins, so let me speak to you cousin to cousin." They were cousins because both were sayyids. I saw a smile on the face of the Empress: she did not mind. But Vaziri was saying, if you are a queen, you are a queen for yourself; but to me you are the daughter of my uncle.

As long as Vaziri lived (he died shortly before the Revolution), the liberals, the intellectuals, those who had some higher education, did not pay too much attention to Sadqui. Every government agency head -- the police chief, the governor, the mayor, and so on -- when they arrived in Yazd would pay a visit to Vaziri, mainly because of his popularity to create a kind of alliance.

The case of Saduqi was somewhat different. The head of

SAVAK, the police, and so on, seemed a bit afraid of Saduqi, considering him a troublemaking mullah. That is, they felt they had to pay tribute to him, lest he make trouble. For instance, once when I was sitting with him, a man came, and as was usual, whispered something in his ear. Saduqi's face turned red, and he said "I'll take care of him." He picked up the phone and called the chief of police, and said, "You! You'll exile me! Do you think I'm afraid of exile? All I have in this world is a few things I know. I'm an 'alem, a ruhani. No matter where I go, I am worth the bread I eat." It was obvious the man on the other end was saying, "I did not say such a thing." And Saduqi continued, "Suppose that you did say it, I want you to know that I am not afraid. Go ahead and do it." No doubt the police chief responded, "By God, I swear I said no such thing." Saduqi replied, "Well, I'm not saying that you did, but suppose that you did, say it if you want to say it, I am not afraid." And sure enough, while I was still sitting there, the police chief arrived, and kissed Saduqi's hand.

Does this story illustrate something? Such things would never happen with Vaziri. When people came to Yazd, they went straight to see Vaziri because he was an interesting fellow and had a library to show off, and Vaziri would make them feel welcome. With Saduqi there were difficulties, say if a person did not have a head cover, but

Vaziri did not mind. In this sense, Vaziri was known for his tolerance, and Sadqui for his fanaticism.

Both Saduqi and Vaziri were excellent preachers, but with quite different styles. Saduqi preached only during the month of Ramadan, and he would draw the largest audiences in Yazd. The Hazireh Mosque would be packed, especially when Ramadan fell in the summer and it became too hot for the shopkeepers to sit in their shops, preferring the fans of the mosque. Saduqi could preach in the most vigorous way for hours, partly because he did not fast. I think he was a diabetic, and so excused from fasting. One year, I remember vividly, he did not preach, and sent the young Rashed-i Yazdi on the minbar in his stead. Rashed began with an incredible faux pas, trying to explain that Saduqi in previous years had been able to preach because he did not fast, and this year he was not preaching. Saduqi, sitting in the audience, enraged, began shouting, "Tell them why I did not fast. I was ill. Tell them why I did not fast: they will spread stories and rumors. The Qur'an says sick persons are exempted."

Saduqi's style of preaching was a mixture of allusions to contemporary social ills, evoking his audience's guilt and fear of hell, and final vesting of hope for redemption in the intercession of Ali and Husain whose supporters and partisans we Shi'ites are. He would speak seriously for a

few minutes, then crack a joke to wake up his audience. Every few moments he would ask the audience to chant a salavat (blessings upon the Prophet and his family), which would have the effect of startling awake those nodding off. He was skilled at alluding to persons without mentioning their names, in such a way that everyone knew who he was talking about. He could thus talk about politics, but more trenchantly he could also talk about those things in society he despised such as the cinema and usury, and invoke the guilt of persons in the local society. Thus, the front rows of the prayer assembly were filled with nusul-khors (usurers, shopkeepers and merchants who made money on loans, futures, short selling, etc.). He loved to scare them with visions of hell, if they did not come to him for the formula converting the forbidden (haram) into the permitted (hallal), through the devices of "legal deceits" (hiyal or kulah shar'i , see Fischer 1980: 158, 278). He was superb in vividly describing the days of final judgment. I remember having dreams for nights of the Sirat Bridge at which the soul is judged on third day after death, and of the serpent that will arrive on the desert of resurrection on the day of judgment. Saduqi would give the exact measurements of the serpent, the width of its mouth, its length. The serpent is asked, "What do you eat?" And in a fearsome voice, Saduqi would intone the snake's responses:

tarikun as salah va lo barak atar (those who neglected to say their prayers, even one rakat); va sharemun al khamr va lo begatratan (those who drink alcohol, even one drop); and so on, a long list, till everyone in the audience was cognizant of being a candidate for the serpent's gullet.

At the end, Saduqi would release the audience with the thought, "We are the partisans of Husain and Ali. We need to reform ourselves. But for past sins, perhaps Husain and Ali will intercede on our behalves."

Or he would utilize a vivid form of the story of Karbala, e.g.: On the day of judgment, everyone head is turned back over their shoulders. Why? Because of their sins? No. Because someone says Fatimah is entering the Plain of Qiamat. The people do not see her. Why? Are they blind? Indeed, the kind of eyes that look lustfully at women are not worthy to see Fatimah. But that is not the reason. Indeed, the people must close their eyes, lower their gaze. Is that because they are namahram (eligible to marry, hence must obey the rules of modest behavior) to Fatimah? But at least the sayyids are her children, and even the mirzas (sayyids though one parent) are her children, and many more of us have ancestors who were sayyids. (Relatives need not veil or circumscribe their gaze before one another.) No, the reason is that Fatimah's face is so radiant, brighter than any sun, that ordinary

people cannot look upon her. Why has she come? To intercede for you, for your crimes, you gamblers, you usurers, you adulterers, you cinema-goers, you thieves . . . To intercede on your behalf? No. She carries beneath her chador, and slowly she takes it out, shall I tell you, can you bear it, the finger tip of Husain (lost in the Battle of Karbala; alternatively the head of Husain, separated from the body and carried off to Damascus as a trophy). She brings it to God that he should punish the killers of Husain. " People would cry, and occasionally even faint.

Most of Saduqi's vaz ("sermon", in Yazd, usually specifically the sermons of Ramadan; more generally, what a va'ez, "preacher" delivers, sometimes contrasted with the specific forms of preachment built around the Karbala story, rowzeh-khani) occurred at noon prayers. But he also preached on the nights of ehyiah, the three or four nights, on one of which the Qur'an was revealed in its entirety: the nineteenth when Ali was mortally wounded; the twenty-first when he died; the twenty-third, his sevjom ("third day") when his soul passed to the next world; and the twenty-seventh when his assassin, Ibn Muljam, was executed. Particularly the first two of these nights, the mosque was jammed. These were the nights when one did one hundred rakat of prayer to make up for any missed prayers during the year. At one point, the lights are turned off,

and people put the Qur'an on their head, and pray that the fourteen pure souls (Muhammad, Fatimah, Ali, Hasan, Husain, and the twelve Imams) intercede with God to forgive their sins. I remember once, when some joker, put black ink in a rose water container, so when he sprinkled the "rose water" into their palms and they wiped the "rose water" over their faces during the blackout, and the lights came on, they got a shock, thinking for a moment that God had painted their faces black as a mark of their sin.

Vaziri's preaching was quite different from Saduqi's. He did not dwell on the ills in society, but rather on the glories of Islam and on the history and culture of Islamic civilization. He was fond, especially if he saw an educated person in the audience, of citing names of European scholars who had acknowledged Islam's greatness, names like Gustav LeBon or Arthur Christiansen. (Saduqi would never invoke the authority of a foreigner.) The most moving parts of Vaziri's preaching was his singing: both the invocation, and the verse of the Qur'an which he would take as his text, and then again at the end the goriz or "turning" to the story of Karbala. (Saduqi never sang, not even the goriz.)

Each in his own way knew the skills of working his audience, a skill that depends upon knowing the audience. There is an apochryphal story about the mullah who went to Rasht on the Caspian Sea, and did a rowzeh for three

nights, getting no reaction: no one cried. So he went to a local mullah to ask what was wrong with these Rashtis. "I told them about the thirst at Karbala and no one cried. I told them about the thirst of Sakineh, the daughter of Husain, and no one cried, and I told them about the thirst of the sixth month old baby of Husain. Still no one cried." The local mullah replied: you don't know your audience. Rashtis have so much water, they have no conception of real thirst. You should tell them about Fadak, the way Fatimeh's garden was illegitimately confiscated, because recently Reza Shah confiscated many lands of these people. And so the mullah took this advice, and was gratified that many people fainted in sympathetic reaction.

Many of the great preachers of Iran came to Yazd. I perhaps got to know them better than most young men since I was in the entourage of both Saduqi and Vaziri. But youngsters in those days enjoyed imitating their styles; it was a form of public entertainment.

Patronage: the route out of Yazd

One day as I was binding books, Vaziri came in and asked me to go out and offer my help to a foreign lady inspecting the tiles and inscriptions of the mosque. I too was eager to use such opportunities to practice my English. This lady was different from others I had met: she was accompanied by an Iranian chauffeur and a second Iranian man,

both of whom bowed whenever she said anything. After guiding her about the mosque, I invited her to visit our library and our collection of old manuscripts. She seemed to enjoy the visit and especially viewing several miniature paintings. She then asked where I had learned my English. I replied, "In Yazd. Without the help of any teacher. If only someone would send me to England or the United States for a few months." It was not the first time I had expressed such a wish, and I was already used to the smile of the foreigners after I would so petition. She however did not smile, and seemed to be lost in thought. Then she asked how much I was being paid. Four hundred ninety tomans a month (about seventy dollars). "Not much," she said, "and what do you do for them?" I answered with a list: bookbinding, calligraphy, translation, cleaning, whatever is needed. She said nothing more.

As we were about to exit, Vaziri stopped us and asked if I had told her about the founder of the library, and whether I had asked her to send some books. "Yes sir," I replied, and I introduced him: "This is Mr. Vaziri, the founder of the library and the one responsible for repairing and reviving the Grand Mosque." I was pleased to see that she already knew better than to try to shake hands with a pious Muslim man. She expressed her admiration, and Vaziri asked me to translate one of his favorite poems, "People see

only a bit of [sesame] oil in the bottle/ They know not what became of the sesame itself." He meant to say how much hardship he had suffered to accomplish all this, and that these accomplishments were the essence of his existence. My English was not very good, but since he frequently asked me to translate this poem, I had worked hard to memorize a good translation. The lady shook my hand warmly, and said, "See you later." I would learn later that she was Monica Fateh, wife of the road construction engineer, Hasan Fateh, who was paving the road between Na'in and Ardakan (some fifty kilometers from Yazd). At the time I knew enough English to know that "see you later" is another way of saying goodbye, and thought it merely the end to a brief encounter.

One afternoon, two young men approached me outside the library. I knew I had seen them somewhere but could not place them. They said I had met them with Monica Fateh. Since I had not asked her name, this only perplexed me. "We are charged to take you to her," they said and motioned to a landrover. My heart stopped: my God, I thought, these must be SAVAK agents. Only a few days earlier SAVAK had arrested three boys who had been regulars at the library. I knew that any resistance or effort to escape would result in my blood being spilled on the street. So I asked if I was permitted to say goodbye to my family. "It's not necessary.

You will be back in two or three hours, " they said. But I had heard this was the usual answer given by SAVAK agents, and that would be the end of him. So I insisted. The driver said: "Fine, but don't take too long. We will wait outside the house."

I do not know how I said goodbye to my wife and child, but it took no more than a moment. I ran out and got in the landrover. Another man, I had not seen, was in the back; his eyes were red, having either just woken up or being drunk. I was offered the front seat. As we drove to "Monica's place" (which turned out to be on the far side of Ardakan) we hardly talked. Only the driver offered me some pistachios and asked me about my English. I replied I had learned my English by working with two Americans who were writing books about Yazd. We passed through the city of Ardakan, and then into the desert again. "Are we going to Tehran?" I asked. "No," said the driver, "only outside the city to the camp." In my heart I repeated, "camp, SAVAK headquarters".

We came to a piece of land surrounded by barbed wire. At the guard booth, two men who looked like construction workers made a crude sexual joke to the driver. We drove on and the driver said to me, "Sons of bitches, that's all they think about. And why not? They get to see their wives or pay a visit to the whore houses in Tehran once or twice a

year." I did not know what to say. We drove toward a temporary building, with a loud generator. We got out and I was told to go inside and wait for Mr. Fateh. "Mrs. Fateh?" I asked. "No, Mrs. Fateh is in Tehran." What difference could it make, who knows if these are their real names. I went inside and sat on a chair at a dining table. A man came and asked if I had eaten. "No, but do not trouble yourself," I replied, although I was dying of hunger. A few moments later a heaping plate of rice and a bowl of stew was placed before me. "I am making fresh tea; it will be ready as soon as you finish eating," the cook said, and then with an inquisitive smile, "Are you going to work for the company?" Interpreting this to mean was I going to cooperate with SAVAK, I said I believed in my country, I would never commit treason against it, and I did not know why I was here. He did not say anything further, but left the room as he heard another man enter.

Mr. Fateh shook hands with me as he introduced himself. He thanked me for my hospitality to his wife in Yazd. "Tell me about yourself," he said as if in a hurry to have the short version of a long story. I did my best. "How about military service?" I said I was about to receive an exemption because of my aging father, my wife and child. "You are married?" "Yes." "That will make it difficult," he said staring into my eyes. I thanked God it was going to

be difficult. "O.K.," he then decided, "if you are really interested in continuing your studies, we will pay the expenses. You must get an exemption from the military so we can get a passport for you. Get a dozen photos, some copies of your birth certificate, and be in Tehran as soon as you can. Here is our address." I was speechless, and before I could say anything, he called the driver: "Qasim, take him back to Yazd, and hurry, his family must be waiting."

Moments later in the landrover, I was interrogating Qasim about Mrs. Fateh and her visit to Yazd, and about Mr. Fateh and what he does for a living. He told me Fateh was the owner of a large construction company. Qasim asked me, "What did Mr. Fateh say? Are you going to work for the company?" "No, he wants to send me abroad." "Yes, to become an engineer and work for his company. He is the best man I have ever known: he has helped so many people." We were at the door of my house. "Good luck," he said, "I will see you in Tehran."¹

A few weeks later, I resigned from Vaziri library to go to Tehran, with leave-taking scenes appropriate to the characters of my immediate boss, Mr. Vaziri, and Ayatullah Saduqi. I had had a running dispute with Mr. Entezari, the head of the library, over salary. I wanted fifty tomans more a month. He resisted, and said he would refer the matter to the parent organization of the library, the Office

of the Shrine of Imam Reza (Ostan-i Qods) in Mashhad. They, of course, would back him in not raising my salary. For one reason, as he insisted, I did not have a high school diploma. (He had one, and had been a teacher.) He did not know about the arrangement with Mr. Fateh. I said, if it is the diploma, I'll get one. Too late, he replied. Why? You are married and already have a child. Angry, I retorted: "I'll be a haramzadeh (bastard) if I come back to live in Yazd without a Ph.D., you will see." I wrote out a letter of resignation. Bureaucratically, he wrote across the top, mofaqat nemishavad ("not approved"). So I took it, tore it up, and said: "I'm leaving, call the police on me if you wish." Entezari went to my father-in-law. My father-in-law, although knowing about Fateh, merely said to Entezari, "It is his own decision."

So next Vaziri called me, and promised me anything, and told me that he planned to make me a member of the governing board of the library in his will. So, I told him that in truth I was resigning to continue my education: ba yek dast nemitunam do hindevaneh bar daram ("I cannot carry two watermelons with one hand."). He inquired where I was going, and I said England. He approved but admonished me, "If you come back like Mehdi Bazargan, my blessings upon you; but if you go with religion, and return without religion, may you never get there." (Agar miri ferang ke

mesle Mehdi-yi Bazargan bar gardi, pedar va madaram be fadayad; vali agar miri ba din miravi va bi din bar migardi omidvaram narasid.)

I then went to say goodbye to Ayatullah Saduqi. He asked what I was going to study. I said I did not know: political science, or sociology, or languages. He said, if you could forgo England, I will send you to Japan as a missionary; the Japanese are thirsty for Islam. I replied that I still needed to learn English. He acquiesced, and then concluded: if you study abroad, study sociology, because I want you to come back and break the teeth of the hypocrite, no good, Shariati. (I was a bit taken aback, because I rather liked what I had read and heard of Shariati.)

1. The Fateh family was from Bahrain, and had moved to Yazd before moving on to Tehran. There were two senior brothers in Tehran: Muhammad Sadeq Fateh, who was killed in the events leading up to the 1977-79 revolution, and who owned a series of companies called "Jahan" -- Jahan Textiles, Jahan Sweets and Oils, etc.; Abul Wahab, a money lender (sarraf), who was the father of my patron, Hasan. Hasan was one of four brothers and a sister. After the Revolution, he moved to England and started a computer business, but it did not do well, and so he invested in bowling alleys in the United

States, managed by his younger brother, Muhammad in Boston. I performed the religious wedding ceremony for Muhammad here in the States; he married the granddaughter of a man in Yazd known as Khan-i Khar Savar (the Khan on the Donkey) because he always was riding a donkey. Hasan has two sons, both now grown, the elder a pilot instructor.

Tehran: Ideological Crucible

I took a TBT bus to Tehran. TBT was supposed to be the best of the bus lines, with new Mercedes buses. Buses left Yazd in the evening and arrived in Tehran early the next morning. My seatmate was a Yazdi whom I vaguely knew, a certain Sabetulqol (literally, "one who keeps his word"). It was from him on the bus, I first learned the word "ideologue". When he asked where I was going, I told him I was going to study. He replied: I hope you come back an ideologue. I asked what the word meant. He said: one who has original ideas.

In the morning we arrived at the Bozorgmehr Bus Station in south Tehran. It was like the arrival scene in the movie, Agha-yi Holu (see Fischer 1984): I got off the bus, and asked someone for directions to Abbasabad, where my friend Muhammad Tabataba'i, whom I had tutored in Yazd, lived. A man pointed north, and like the greenhorn I was, I picked up my bags and started walking. Instead of asking, at each street I assumed it might only be a street or two further. It was not until five p.m. that I arrived in north Tehran at Muhammad's door. When he opened it, his face registered shock, and he said, "oh my God, what is wrong?" "Nothing, I'm just tired," I said. "What brings you to Tehran? You must be sick. Do you have cancer, you look so pale?" "No, I've come to study." "You will die in this city: it is not for you. You like warm, friendly,

cooperative people. Here no one talks to anyone." "I hope you will not treat me like that." "No, no. You are welcome. Stay a few days, even a week, even fifteen days." "Do not worry, I'll only spend the night. I have arranged everything."

The next day he took me to Paradise, the Fateh company. Ahmad Ragerdi, the guard, stopped me with questions: where are you going, who are you, what is your name. But the driver Ahmad Reza'i saw me and said, "He's a friend of Fateh, let him in." The secretary, a British woman, Mrs. Akbari, welcomed me and called Fateh. Fateh offered me a room in the building, five hundred tomans a month (slightly more than I had been getting at Vaziri Library), and then told me: I want you to go to the British Council at Ferdowsi Circle and register for English classes; I also want you to register for high school; and if you have time, it would not be bad to learn some French at the Institut Francaise. I was a bit surprised. I thought I was to be sent to England. I had my passport all ready. But I did not say anything. Mrs. Fateh then arrived and explained they thought it best for me not to go directly to England. I assumed I was being tested.

A year later, in a conversation Fateh had with Michael Fischer in my presence, I learned that it had been S. Husain Nasr (then Chancellor of the Aryamehr Technical University,

and now a University Professor at George Washington University), who convinced him not to send me directly to England: this provincial lad, first see if he can survive and flourish in Tehran.

So I registered in three schools. In the mornings I went to the British Council. In the afternoons to the Institut Francaise. And in the evenings to the Elmiye High School, near the Majlis (Parliament). It had been difficult to find a high school that offered the Persian literature program; it seemed Elmiye was the only such school. Clearly everyone in Tehran wanted the science track that would prepare them for jobs. The Elmiyeh High School prided itself that Sadeq Hedayat had gone there.

The night school class was full of characters, almost a grotesquerie. The principal was a foul mouthed alcoholic who sprayed saliva as he spoke or shouted. The philosophy teacher was Baqer Chubak, a cousin of the novelist, Sadeq Chubak. He was extremely funny, but also outspokenly sarcastic about the Shah and his White Revolution, so that we feared the soldiers might burst in at any time. The Arabic teacher was a Kurd, Naserzadeh. I tutored his younger daughter in math, and he regularly gave me a lift to class. We became good friends, and he was the first to tell me about the Kurdish sense of oppression under the Iranian state. He invited me once to a picnic in a village north of

Tehran where everyone was in Kurdish dress, spoke Kurdish, drank arak and danced. His elder daughter on that occasion translated for me, and began to tell me about cultural differences. One of her examples was poetry: in Persian poetry, you speak of the beloved as being like a flower or a cypress; in Kurdish poetry we speak of the beloved as being like a gun, or walking like a horse.

There were some thirty-five of us students in the class, all trying to get a high school diploma. There was Daoud Hadadi, the young brother-in-law of General Bahram Aryana. He was a playboy in his twenties, who had gotten a position in the Plan Organization thanks to the General, but now that the General had fallen from favor, he feared some personnel officer might notice he had no diploma and he would lose his job. I tutored him for a while. Then there was Hajji Nekunam, in his forties, who always spoke about Tayeb, the former strongman of the Tehran bazaar. It seems Tayeb had gotten him his position as head of the telephone office for the Ecbatana district of Tehran. Again, since Tayeb's departure, he feared someone would notice his lack of a diploma and he would lose his job. I tutored him as well, and in partial payment he allowed me to telephone anywhere free. I took advantage of this to call Yazd, and once even England. Others in the class included a gendarme who wanted a diploma so he could be promoted to a military

rank, a carpenter who wanted a government job, and three others who began my Tehran political education. Saqafi, a clerk in his twenties, was a relative of Khomeini's wife. I tutored him as well, and he spoke often of Khomeini, but especially of Taleqani, who was in jail. He talked of Taleqani as a trainer of guerillas. Another student, a shirt-maker from Mashhad, talked to me about the Mujahheddin, saying his brother was in jail. He spoke against private property and against the superficial Islam we were taught. Why he sought me ought, I'm not sure, but I was a bit afraid of him, and uncomfortable since I was grateful to one capitalist (Fateh) for helping me. I tested him by asking if he could make me a shirt, and how much he would charge. He said, of course, he would, we could go together and buy the cloth, and he would only charge me a nominal five tomans to make it. I still have that shirt, but I feared to develop the friendship with him.

Finally, there was a student who worked in the pharmacy of the gendarmerie, a zealous fan of Dr. Ali Shariati. He was the one who really introduced me to Shariati. This man felt personally indebted to Shariati. He was born illegitimately, and felt the stigma powerfully. In a heavily religious society, there are various social functions that are prescribed by various qualifications, often beginning with "of legitimate birth". Moreover he

felt the sin of illegitimacy meant he was almost certainly destined for hell, and he kept changing jobs, first to avoid discovery, but also in search of a job which would gain him merit which might counter the sin of his birth. So when he joined the gendarmes, he volunteered to work in the hospital and pharmacy. He never went to the mosque but piously said his prayers at home alone. His great desire was to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the eighth Imam, Imam Reza, in Mashhad. But it was widely believed that anyone of illegitimate birth who entered the shrine would have a nosebleed and be exposed. One day, in the Hosainiyeh Ershad, he met Shariati and asked to confide in him for advice. Shariati heard his story and responded that it was all nonsense, that a good person needed to fear neither the shrine nor hell. How can I be sure, the man wanted to know. "I guarantee it," Shariati assured him, "go test it." And the man did so, and was forever grateful. He was to become part of my conscience when I took up the following year with a communist: with the Islam of Shariati, he would chide me, why do you want to dabble with communism?

With him I went to hear Shariati deliver two of his famous lectures: "Shahadat" ("Witnesses/ Martrys") delivered in the Hosainiyeh Ershad on Tashua, the ninth of Moharram; and "After Shahadat" delivered in the Congregational Mosque of Narmak on the night closing the day of Ashura, the tenth

of Muharram. The former was a long speech, the latter short and electric. I vividly remember how Shariati shouted and raised his hands with such power that I thought at any moment the shah's troops would burst in to wreak vengeance. Indeed there were rumors that Mujahhedin pamphlets had been circulated and a few people had been arrested. (It was said that the regime often would arrest a few people and leave, so there would be no witnesses or confrontation, but so that terror would be maximized.) The shah had just killed ten mujahheddin, and Shariati spoke in the present tense of the martyrs referring more to present than to Husain: He began with phrases that brought riveting silence to his audience: "My brothers, my sisters, now the martyrs are dead, and we the dead are alive. Those who had the courage to die chose death, and we the cowards continue to live. The martyrs left us a message, us, the deaf and blind of history. . . "

I tutored a number of these characters from the Elmiyeh High School. I also put up a notice at the British Council that I was available to tutor elementary math, Persian and Arabic. A Mrs. Hajizadeh, an English lady married to an Iranian, called and hired me to teach her children Persian for five hundred tomans a month. Both she and her husband were very nice to me, and sometimes gave me extra money with the admonition not to tell the other. Fateh, who proved to be a friend of theirs, found out, and

said why don't you teach my children, I'll pay you. I of course replied that I would gladly teach his students for free. So, I was doing well those days, with free room, often meals at the Hajizadeh or Fateh house, and money in my pocket. I lived in the Paradise Co. compound, which once had been the Fateh home, a lovely large house not far from the university. Two of the servants became my companions. Amu Reza (Uncle Reza), the gardener, a Yazdi, hired originally by Hasan Fateh's father, came early in the morning and always began cooking soup. He was constantly going back and forth between his gardening and his soup. He had deformed legs and was quite a character. In the evenings he took the bus back to his family.

Ahmad Ragerdi, the guard, was on duty twenty-four hours a day, every day. He complained he got to see his wife, back in the village of Ragerd, near Khomein, only three times a year. He was very lonely, but had a temper, so many people avoided him. He always wanted to invite me to share food, and especially to sing religious dirges (noeh) for him, so he could cry, since as he put it he could not go out to rowzehs (the preachments that end with weeping for Husain: see Fischer 1980). Once we shared Ashura together, and he begged me to sing the dirges for Husain. He began to beat his chest so hard, I feared he would cause himself real harm, so I stopped. He begged me to continue.

I said I would but only if he would moderate his chest beating. We began again. He continued to pound his chest. I stopped, but he continued wailing, "Husain, Husain", interspersing his invocations of and to Husain with laments about his family and hard life, until he collapsed.

The summer after this first year in Tehran, I was sent to England, to Crosby House (or Crazy House as the students styled it) in Bournemouth, an English language school mainly attended by French students. Before I went, I was taken to see Alameh Nuri. People going to England were often taken to him to strengthen their faith. He was famed for having converted many Christians to Islam. In reality, hippies would be picked up in the streets and taken to him; he would talk to them about Islam, give them books, have their photo taken, and claim to have converted them. He was a rich mullah from Mazandaran, with a large library, and had founded the World Organization for Islamic Services to propagate Islam. He also had a Ph.D. from the University of Tehran and taught there although a recognized member of the opposition to the Shah. He had been told my English was good, so he did not try to say anything to me in English, but talked about the untranslatability of idioms.

I was afraid to fly, so I asked Fateh if I could take the bus: TBT to Istanbul, then a German bus to Munich, then another bus to Ostend. I was surprised in London and again

in Bournemouth that no one seemed curious about this stranger in their midst: no one stopped to stare or talk, as we did whenever a European appeared in Yazd. When I finally got to Bournemouth and tried ask directions to my lodgings with a Mrs. Stevenson on Winbourne Road, either people would not stop to answer or I could not follow their rapid speech. One sweet little old lady stopped and asked, "Where are you from?" "Iran" "Never heard of it." "Persia." "Oh. Do you know the Shah?" "Yes." "That's nice." And she walked off. Finally someone put me on a bus, and the conductor said, "When I say cemetary, you get off." Having heard all sorts of stories about racism in England, I took this as an insult, and did not want to get off when the bus stopped and he said "cemetary". (I thought he was telling me to go to hell.) But I got off and then saw a street sign for Winbourne Road. Mrs. Stevenson had several rooms to let: there was an Iraqi and a Portuguese student. The Iraqi was an obnoxious twit, who claimed to be a communist, but had a new car every month, and a bevy of girlfriends, and was the son of a capitalist. Mrs. Stevenson, a striking woman in her forties, a gymnast, liked to say this Iraqi and I had the eyes of Omar Sharif. The stay in England was good for my language skill, and expanding my horizons -- I would return to Europe the next summer as a guide to a rich Iranian family -- but to relate most of the incidents that

happened would only sound like the travelogue of Amin-ud-Dowleh who visited Europe in the nineteenth century and tells how he fell in love with European girls seventeen times. One incident, however, was significant, and shook my faith.

I had met an Anglican priest in Yazd, a Father Winter. So one day I called him and he invited me to spend a weekend with him in Winchester. He took me on his rounds to visit the sick, he showed me the Cathedral, and pointed out the graves of several Crusaders as well as that of a bishop who had debated Charles Darwin. I asked who won the debate, fully expecting him to say the bishop. To my surprise he answered that he thought they had not really understood one another and that each was talking about different aspects of man, the one about biological man, the other about spiritual man. Asked a similar question, at the time, I never would have admitted a Muslim could have not won a debate. I was impressed. I was also impressed with his simple life style and his life of service. I began to think to myself, how could such a man be condemned to hell. (There is a saying of the Prophet that "My religion will divide into seventy two sects; all of them will go to hell but one." I began to think of Bishop Dehqani-Tafti, the convert to Christianity from Taft near Yazd, and for the first time felt a glimmer of understanding of how someone

might come to convert to Christianity. And I thought of Shaikh Gholam Reza Faghi Khorasani, the late pious ayatollah of Yazd (to whose position Ayatullah Saduqi had succeeded): he once had visited Kurdistan and witnessed the rituals of the Aliullahi. Impressed, he had said, let us leave lest we stay and lose our faith. So too I was relieved that I was able to leave at the end of the weekend.

My second year in Tehran, I discovered that one need not register at a high school to get a diploma, but could just take an exam, and so I registered for the free preparation classes at Hasht Rudi high school near Paradise Co. It was here that I met Shamlu, possibly a relative of the poet. In the English conversation class, one day we were asked to tell our father's occupation. Everyone answered straightforwardly, except Shamlu, who said, "My father is a proletarian." The teacher responded: "If you say such things, you'll go to the surokh ("hole", i.e. jail)." "Which hole?" he beligerantly responded. "The hole in which they offer you pepsi" (i.e. torture with a bottle). That was the day I learned the word proletarian. I asked him after class what it meant. "A worker; one with nothing but his arm to sell." "Nothing?" I was now being belligerent: "no house, nothing? You chain smoke cigarettes, you must have money." "Don't be so literal." A few days later in composition class, an essay was set on

books. Mine ended with the sentence, "Every book is worth reading at least once." Shamlu shouted from the back, "Bullshit." The teacher ostentatiously gave me a "20", the highest grade. Shamlu heckled: "Yes, it is this kind of false praise that gives people false pride, so that even Shemr cannot stop them." After class, he came up to me and said, do you know why I said what I did? "Because you dislike me." "No, just the contrary. I know you read a lot, but you have to analyze things. Your logic is Aristotelian, static, not dynamic, dialectical."

And so over the next few weeks he introduced me to the vocabulary and argumentation of marxism. He gave me a book (with the cover carefully removed) on dialectical logic, which he warned me was dangerous to talk about, could lead to being condemned to death. It was secret knowledge, knowledge that had been suppressed throughout history. He spoke of the ancient heroes Mazdak and Babak as dialecticians history had suppressed. He read me a passage one day, full of exploits of a great man, without revealing the name of the man. I knew enough of the argument against the "great man in history" now to reject the passage. He gleefully pointed out that the passage was about Muhammad, and then turned the tables once more by saying for the time Muhammad was progressive. Nothing is static: what is progressive in one era, is reactionary in another; there is no eternal essence, but things continually are in a process

of becoming (something else).

The month of Ramadan came, and I vowed not to talk to him unless he fasted. He agreed, but broke his fast each evening with a bottle of beer. One day, he said, come to my house and we'll make some kebabs. He had difficulty starting the fire, and he brought out an old Qur'an and used it as tinder. I was aghast: my hair literally stood up on my skin, and I started trembling. I thought death would surely strike us. I had been claiming to be a communist, and he grinned and grabbed my trembling hand, saying: so you are a communist, no you aren't. I argued with him that revolution was unrealistic, that people were doing fine, though my tutoring I got to see many kinds of people. Where do you tutor, he asked. Niavaran (north Tehran), I said. You don't see south Tehran, he said. I do. In fact I was tutoring a Lur from Malayer, and would go to the room he shared with his parents and sister, and a carpet loom. It was after the conversation with Shamlu that this Lur invited me to share a meal: it was a terrible greasy rice with almost nothing in it. Suddenly Shamlu's words had their effect: I saw sharply the poverty of the room, the poor clothes, and the contrast between Fateh serving his dogs meat, and these people having no meat at all. For days thereafter I went about classifying everyone into exploiter and exploited, but I could never persuade myself that the

revolution should liquidate all the exploiters without exception. Fateh could not be in that category.

I, of course, did not become a communist, but it was Shamlu who prepared me for the ideological battles I was to find in Lawrence, Kansas. At the end of this second year in Tehran, I took the university entrance exam, and scored highest among the thirteen thousand literature stream applicants. This entitled me to a scholarship from the Shah's government. I had gone to the office of Habib Dashti, a Yazdi in the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, whom I had once met in the Vaziri Library, on the advice of Mrs. Fateh to find out about schools in the U.S. He offered me the scholarship, with the condition only that I return to Iran. I said I had to consult Saduqi, which I did. Saduqi told me to reject the offer, the Imam had forbidden any cooperation with the government. I rebutted: it is not cooperation, they are giving me money I deserve. He replied sharply, "You wanted the truth. I gave it to you." When I returned to Tehran, I told Mr. Fateh about the scholarship, and as soon as I started to say, "but", he said: "You don't want it". Again he promised to help me financially, but only myself: he would not support a whole family. That summer I took some rich Iranians on a trip to Europe as their "guide". And when I returned I began filling out university applications for the U.S. with the

help of Michael Fischer, who had returned to Iran to do a study of the theological schools in Qum. Although we filled out six applications, that from Kansas came back with an acceptance first: no SATs were required, the tuition was relatively cheap, and it was a regular pipeline for Iranian students. Indeed it was called "kafseh regim" (the cage of the regime), since it had some three to four hundred Iranian students each year. For three months, I worked with Fischer in Qum: for me, it was an interesting, if sometimes somewhat disillusioning experience to see the workings of the clerical center up close. I brought my wife and three year old son, and the four of us lived in a house just behind the Qum shrine between the establishments of Ayatullah Marashi and Ayatullah Shariatmadari.

Lawrence, Kansas

[The United States and Europe have been major breeding grounds for Islamic fundamentalism. It is here with freedom of expression wider than at home, students and others are able to debate and organize. The alien openness of Euro-American society functions like the relatively fast-paced life in Tehran or Cairo, in causing youth from traditional families to defensively seek the security of fundamentalist rules and discipline, and to obsessively focus on the corruptions of the political elites of their home countries. Iranians divided by political loyalties were often suspicious of one another; not only was their constant fear of SAVAK, but Muslim activists and leftists activists disagreed strongly. In some cities like Boston, leftists clustered at one university while Muslims clustered at another, and quietist de facto loyalists to the shah's regime clustered at yet a third. In other cities like Lawrence, all factions were strong presences on the same campus. After the Revolution, the divisions continued, and sometimes bloody fights broke out between militant pro-Khomeini Hezbollahis and anti-Khomeini Mujaheddin. Baton Rouge, Louisiana was a stronghold of Hezbollahis; Houston for a time had small but active groups of both Mujaheddin and Liberation Movement people. Houston, the home of Ibrahim Yazdi, the first Foreign Minister of the

Islamic Republic and founder of the Liberation Movement in Houston, also became home to a growing population of non-Iranian Muslims: the growing pains of the wider Muslim community are explored in another chapter.]

I arrived in Lawrence, Kansas, on 19 January 1976, by bus from Kansas City after a long flight from Tehran. As I got off the bus, I noticed two Iranians quarreling and calling each other names, like cab drivers fighting for the same passenger. I was surprised to discover the quarrel was over me. One had a big "communist" mustache, the other an Islamic beard. They represented the two Iranian anti-shah activist groups in Lawrence. As I soon found out, they were regularly assigned by their groups to find the new students and bring them in for political education.

The communist, "Bahram" who was eventually hanged by the Islamic Republic some years later, grabbed my suitcase out of the hands of the Muslim and put it in the trunk of his big American car. He opened the door for me and asked where I was going. I gave him the name of the dormitory. He lit a fresh cigarette with the butt of the one he was just finishing and filled the car with smoke. Three other passengers were already in the car. He began talking about "these Muslims" who do nothing but fill their stomachs with halal meat, learn to kiss ass with Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, pursue girls, and pray to God that the shah should fall like an

apple from the tree. He went on about the shah as the most brutal and corrupt man on earth, not even merely a running dog of Imperialism. By the time I arrived at the dorm, I was already half way to being a convinced communist. I had heard already in Yazd of "revolutionary students" scattered through Europe and the United States, but I did not know there were different feuding groups. Bahram helped me check in to the dormitory and find my room on the tenth floor. He continued to chain smoke. I was very tired, but too polite to ask him to leave, and had to sit up to listen to him talk and talk. Finally he said he had an appointment, but would return the next evening to take me to a banquet.

Life in the dormitory required some adjustment. I had my privacy in my room, but it was very difficult to share the showers with Americans who did nothing to cover themselves. Three other Iranians were on my floor, two from Isfahan, and one from Shiraz. The one Isfahani, Husain, was chubby, hirsute, talkative and naive. He had a beard not because he was overly religious, but because his beard grew so fast. He took a shower once a week, just as I had been accustomed back in Yazd. He was from a Sufi family, and I struck an immediate bond with him by reciting some verses of the Masnavi of Rumi. The other Isfahani, Abbas, was a thin, "pretty boy", who would never have been allowed to return if he had gone to Qazvin. He was very proud of his

mathematical skills, but beyond math and science he had no interests. Both Isfahanis were penny-pinchers. Jamshid, by contrast, was just as stereotypically Shirazi: generous with his money, pleasure-seeking, compassionate, and good-looking.

The next evening, Bahram came. I had told Husain, Abbas, and Jamshid about the banquet, and they asked if they could come. Bahram already knew them and called them "our children". The five of us went to McCullum, another dormitory. In the basement a hundred or so Iranian students were gathered in front of a movie screen. An Isfahani, Farhad Amidi, in his mid thirties was giving a lecture, which I found hard to follow, filled as it was with unfamiliar jargon terms like bourgeoisie comprador, superstructure, infrastructure, and so on. The lecture ended and the film began. It was about Vietnam and the American crimes. In the dark, pamphlets were distributed. Husain whispered in my ear in a trembling voice, "I am afraid . . . SAVAK". I told him to keep quiet. After the movie we were not allowed to leave. The comrades needed to enlighten us, and so they did for two hours.

When we finally left, Husain gave me his pamphlet and beseeched, "Please, do not report me if you are from the security organization". I assured him I had nothing to do with politics, and not to be ridiculous. But I understood:

in Iran we had always been told to dissimulate, even your brother might be a SAVAK agent, and if he is, it is his duty to report on you. The four of us decided after fifteen days to move out of Temlin Hall and rent an apartment. With Bahram's help, we found a two bedroom apartment for two hundred fifty dollars a month, next to a grocery, and on the bus line to the University. The Isfahanis roomed together, and Jamshid and I. Bahram visited regularly to see me -- the others quickly lost interest, fearing anti-shah politics to be dangerous -- until one evening we had an argument and I threw him out.

Bahram had been discoursing about the reactionary nature of religion in general, and Islam in particular. All of us were angered. We four still said our prayers regularly. I began angrily shouting at Bahram that we would not let him insult our religion, that he spoke of workers without any respect for the religion of the workers, that if he gave an Iranian worker a gun and told him God did not exist, the worker would shoot him before thinking about shooting the soldiers of the shah. Bahram left slamming the door, and shouting that my head was still filled with Islamic bullshit. Bahram later apologized to me, and we continued our talks.

Meanwhile my roommates joined the Muslim Students' Association, and asked me to join too. One night we went to

an M.S.A. meeting. They said pretty much the same things the communists did, except that they referred to the shah as pharoah and Yezid, and to Khomeini as Moses or Husain. They criticized Marx for failing to distinguish Islam from other religions which were opiates of the masses. They said Lenin was a despot, and that communism was less egalitarian than Islam. Moreover, communism had no popular support in Islamic Iran, and so anyone who preached communism was some fifty years behind the times. This was a new kind of Islamic gathering for me. It was not the first time I had heard that Ali, Husain, Zainab, and other Islamic heroes were really leftists fighting for the liberation of the poor against the capitalists of their day. I had read Shariati. But I also remembered Saduqi's charge to me: "May you study sociology in America, so that you can come back and break the teeth of the atheist Shariati and so help Islam to triumph. "How different were these students from the clerics in whose name they said they were fighting. They seemed to have little idea about the divisions among the clergy. They themselves were divided into those who followed the Liberation Movement of Mehdi Bazargan and Ibrahim Yazdi; and those who followed the Mujaheddin-i Khalq and emphasized the writings of S. Mahmud Taliqani. But all agreed that Khomeini was their "Imam". I remained somewhat disaffected from them because of their ignorance of Islam.

That term was also my introduction to fast American women. There was a church that had a friendship club for foreign students, and was known as a place where one could find easy girls. Indeed the women who came here seemed to be fascinated by and hungry for Middle Eastern males.

After the first term, my three roommates moved to a smaller college. They had come to Lawrence only for English language training. So that summer, I moved in with some Saudis. This was a quite different crowd: they had money to spend, constantly partied, smoked marijuana, drank alcohol, listened to music, gambled, and were surrounded by women. None of them said their prayers, nor did they have any political interests. Mansur, said to be of the royal family, drove a red Monte Carlo. Muhammad, a Bedouin by any standard, had a Trans Am. Muhammad knew no English except the names of drinks. In the fall, Mansur and I shared an apartment. The arrangement was that I would clean and cook, and he would pay the rent. He also claimed to want a studious roommate to help him get serious about his own studies. But the parties continued, and the apartment was full of Arabs and their American girlfriends every evening.

One night, I was saying my prayers behind closed doors in my room, while a party was in progress. I had just finished when the door opened, and Ibrahim came in. He sat on the bed and began asking questions about my religion. "I

am a Muslim, just like you," I said. "No, you are from the party of Ali." "So, what do you mean?" "You are a rafidi. You prostrate on the dust of Karbala: that is idolatry." "No, it is not." "Yes it is." "But I do not drink, gamble or smoke grass." "That is irrelevant. Wrong is wrong." "But you do not say your prayers. This is the only way I have learned to worship my God." "Your way of worshipping is wrong."

Soon others took his side. I never understood this contradictory fanaticism. But it was an important lesson: one did not have to be a practicing Muslim to be a Muslim zealot.

Mansur eventually got a phone call from Saudi Arabia that his father was very ill. He left the States, and his education, apparently for good. So I had to look for a job. I first found one as a dish washer in a greasy spoon called "Country Kitchen Restaurant", and then later I landed a job first as a waiter and then as a cook in a Greek restaurant in Kansas City. In the meantime my wife Marziyeh and son Reza came to join me. They stayed for, then Marziyeh could not stand being in the land of the infidel, and returned to Iran. Eventually after I moved to Rice University, they returned, but that saga of the difficulties of a provincial family from Yazd adjusting to America must be left for another time.

Chapter 2

DR. ALI SHARIATI, THE IDEOLOGUE OF MODERN SHI'ISM

Introduction

Once upon a time, when I was still working in the Vaziri Public Library of Yazd, a university student came in to donate some mimeographed paperbacks, all with innovative names and all by Dr. Ali Shariati, about whom we had heard many contradictory things. Since the founder of the library believed that a library should be a "spiritual pharmacy", it was our policy not to refuse any kind of donation, no matter how "poisonous:", but we were highly restricted in letting everyone read everything. To be on the safe side, the library director informed the librarians of the possible danger Shariati's books posed: "Some say he is a Wahhabi. Some say he is an agent of colonialism, hired to destroy Islam. Some say he is a SAVAK agent, hired to stain the reputation of the ruhaniyat. Some say he has some good ideas and good intentions. We simply do not know. Ask my permission before you give any of these books to anyone". Only a few people, almost all university students, ever asked about Shariati's books. And soon we received another batch of books and articles, this time refutations of Shariati.

One thing was sure: there was a serious verbal battle going on, in Tehran and elsewhere, between a certain "Dr.

Shariati", who had managed to gather a large group of followers among university students, and the official guardians of the faith, the ruhaniyat, who continued to rule the mind and the heart of Muslim masses, and who were opposed to many (if not all) Shariati's views. In Yazd, however, Shariati had little following, and he was in fact virtually unknown. Many were under the wrong impression that he was a "physician"; many knew he was a "sociologist" educated in Paris, without knowing what sociology was.

One day, I was assigned to carry a written message from the founder of the library to a clergyman in his house. I think it was a note of apology that he could not attend a certain meeting. As I arrived, from the kind of shoes taken off behind the door of the guestroom, I discovered the presence of many mullas. A loud voice, of a young mulla whom I knew, read passages from a certain book, and the audience chanted curses and damnations. It took the clergyman a few minutes to read the message and to write a response at the bottom of the letter for me to take back, but the gathering went on uninterrupted. "May the Almighty God kill Shariati and the rest of the enemies of Islam", said the reader of the passages, and a loud "amen!" followed. "Let us pray instead", someone said, "that God may bring him to the straight path". "No", another voice said, "all the options have been exhausted. Repentance of a

wolf is death. It is too late for this stubborn apostate to recant".

In 1974, a few weeks after I had arrived in Tehran, a classmate of mine asked me whether I had read anything by Shariati. "Yes", I said, "but I am not so sure who he is and what he wants to say. Only by accident, two years ago, when I was in Tehran for a few days, I heard two of his lectures, "Shahadat" and "After Shahadat". He has a golden mouth, but I disagree with his ideas. He is going to get a lot of people killed for nothing". "Nothing?", he interrupted me, "What you call 'nothing' is everything. I used to be a communist. After going to Ershad a few times, I changed my ideology. If there is anything which could save us from all the ills of this society, it must be Shariati's Islam". The long debate ended without any agreement on either part, but I agreed to read a few books of Shariati before making any further judgment.

Shortly before I went abroad for further studies, I went to say farewell to Ayatullah Saduqi in Yazd. "What do you want to study?", he asked. "I still do not know. Political science, sociology, linguistics . . . , I am not sure yet". "Sociology", he interrupted me, "yes, you should study sociology and come back to break the face of the apostate Shariati". By then I had developed some sympathy for Shariati and his "brand new Islam", but I said nothing

meaningful to Saduqi in response.

When I arrived in the United States, I found Shariati to be the ideologue of many Iranian students; it was with his brand of Islam alone that Muslim students could brag about their "revolutionary ideology" vis a vis the Iranian Marxists. If his books were banned in Iran, there were plenty of them available in the United States, the availability which increased right after Shariati's mysterious death.

The Iranian intellectual atmosphere finally changed in favor of Shariati and "his Islam", beginning shortly before the Islamic Revolution, particularly the period after Shariati's mysterious death in England, and it continued until the political triumph of the ruhaniyat and the return of traditional Islam, when Shariati's picture gradually disappeared from the scene and, "Ali Abolhasani (Monzer), a theologian of Qumm, devoted some 450 pages to discrediting him as a "conspirator" at the price of glorifying Mortda Mutahhari, Shariati's longtime opponent. Shariati's biggest "crime", according to Monzer, is that he advocated Islam menha ye akhund, "Islam without clergy"¹.

In this period, the period of Shariati's "life after death", he was given much lip-service as "the teacher of revolution", "the mentor of martyrdom", and an "ever-living martyr". His famous slogan, "martyr[dom] is the heart of

history", was written on the graves of many young people killed in the process of revolution. His short-lived Islam, however, was no more than a bridge, a temporary ideology which helped give victory to the very Islam that he had attempted to replace with his. Today, "Shariati's Islam" is, at least for the most part, that of the past, an abandoned bridge which once upon a time served its crucial function.

Here, I write about Shariati's life and thought for two important reasons: first, to produce a meaningful biography of an educated man who lived and died in a crucial period of Iranian history and turned into a revolutionary myth; second, to show how, in the words of Clifford Geertz, new wine is put into old bottles and old wine into new bottles: how could an old religious tradition be translated into a new and attractive ideology for political action. I am not so interested in the "sociology of Shariati" in the sense of what he possibly contributed to the discipline; I am rather interested in reflecting upon the sociology of his works and the kind of revolutionary atmosphere he helped create in an Islamic environment.

* * *

Apparently the only male child of his parents, Ali Shariati was born in Azar 2, 1312 (November 23, 1933) in a deeply religious Shi'ite family, in the provincial capital

of Khurasan, Mashad², a relatively modern city which owes its importance to the tomb of the only Shi'ite Imam buried in Iran: Ali ibn Musa al-Rida. One of the largest cities of Iran, Mashad is located near the ruins of the old city of Tus, where the greatest Iranian epic poet, Firdawsi, is buried. "Shi'ite Islam", symbolized by Imam Rida, and "Iranian nationalism", symbolized by Firdawsi: Shariati was the synthesis of both and much more.

"Khurasan" rings many different bells: it is one of the last Iranian frontiers falling into Arab hands, it is the home of Abu-Muslim (d.137 / 755) who played a major military role in the fall of the Umayyads (40-132 / 660-750) and the rise of the Abbasids (132-656 750-1258), it has given birth to many scholars, theologians, philosophers and poets, and finally, its capital has continued to the present to be one of the major strongholds of Islamic theology, even after the rise the theological seminaries of Qumm (1340 / 1921), the city where the tomb of Fatimah Ma'sumah, Imam al-Rida's sister, is located.

On the west of Mashad, between the historical Nishabur and modern Shahrud, there is Sabzavar, which is built upon the ruins of ancient city of Bayhaq, the home of the historian Bayhaqi (385-470 / 997-1077). Shariati's paternal forefathers were all from the suburbs of Sabzavar (Bahmanabad and Mazinan, in particular), an old Shi'ite

stronghold where, in the first half of 8th/14th century, the brave Sarbidaran (737-783 / 1318-1337) rebelled against the Mongols and established their independent government.

"Sabzavari", "Mazinani", "Khurasani" and "Sarbidari", are some of the secret pen-names Shariati used, when his real name, "Ali Shariati Mazinani" could be dangerous.

From his mother side, Shariati is connected with a family of feudal landowners³, and it is somewhat strange that he never refers to his mother (d.1962) in his writings, except on the first page of his famous "Fatimah is Fatimah" (1970, see below), where he dedicates the work to "the soul of my mother, Zahra, the mirror of humility, sentiment and piety, for whom life was nothing but suffering, and whose existence was all kindness for me". Shariati's paternal forefathers, as far as we can trace back, were all important local religious scholars in the suburb of Sabzavar, one of whom, Allamah Bahmanabadi, a disciple of the philosopher Haj Mulla Hadi Sabzavari (1212-1295 / 1797-1878), received royal invitation of Naseraddin Shah (r.1848-1896), to move to Tehran to teach Islamic philosophy in Sepahsalar theological center, which he did for a short period of time. Despite the generous royal offer, forty tomans a year, Allamah moves back to his village, where he finally dies and is buried.⁴

Neither the royal invitation to an unknown village nor the polite "resignation" and "return" of Bahmanabad to his

village is so unusual: Islamic philosophy of this period is highly connected with self-seclusion and pietism, escape from the deceit of worldly goods, even occasional refraining from marriage.⁵ And, if nothing else, the Qajar king had the capacity to appreciate the bitter message of a religious scholar, once it was put in sweet words: Naseraddin Shah, it said, arrives the home of Sabzavari, where he asks for a drink. Dugh, a yogurt drink popular in Iran, is what the philosopher offers. "Give me some wine instead", the king says. The royal command could be interpreted in two ways: literally, "I am a king, and I have the liberty of drinking wine (strictly forbidden in Islam) in the presence (even from the very hands) of a grand theologian". Symbolically, "wine" stands for "wisdom", philosophical and mystical wisdom in particular. "I know", Sabzavari replies, "His Majesty is not a drinker of wine; otherwise, I would give him a cup of wine which would keep him drunk forever".

Perhaps, this was the very cup which confined Hafez to Shiraz, Sabzavari to his cottage, Mirza Jahangir Khan to "Kharabat"⁶, and Qumsha'i to a room in "Madrshah", and made Shariati's grandfather to prefer the solitude of his "Mahtab-kharabah" (lit: "moonshine ruin") to a royal palace.

Shariati, apparently not so proud of his maternal side of his family, mentions his paternal forefathers, his great grandfather Akhund -e Hakim in particular, with much pride

and sensation. He is delighted and inspired to hear the villagers speak of the haloes of heavenly miracle embracing the lives and afterlives of his pious and learned paternal forefathers, who cared so little about name, fame, wealth and worldly status⁷. He is so grateful to them for having chosen such a pietistic lifestyle rather than having become famous marja' talids like Abu al-Hasan Isfahani (1284-1365 / 1866-1945) or Muhammad Kazin Khurasani (1255-1329) (who was in fact a pupil of Akhund -e Hakim in philosophy). His forefathers, he is proud to say, were beyond and above positions of ilm and ijtihad⁸.

Shariati's father, Muhammad Taqi Shariati (1286-1408 / 1869-1987), was a well known Shi'ite scholar of national fame, an expert of modern Quranic exegesis⁹, and a long time political activist, connected with the partisans of Musaddeq¹⁰. Muhammad Taqi, however, broke two family traditions: he moved to the city for good at the age of twenty, and he left the traditional garb of the Ulama to teach in modern secular schools rather than in theological seminaries. Breach of these two traditions were daring and successful attempts: really pious is one who can be pious out of the circle and garb of piety. As Hafiz says, "the passengers of love swim in the sea without ever getting wet". (I never forget when, for the first time, I saw his photo in Mr. Vaziri's journal album. He was the only one

wearing a chapeau rather than a turban. "What is this guy doing here?", I asked. "To show that being learned and pious has little to do with two meters of white cotton", was his answer.

Unlike his "father, Ali attended modern elementary school (6 years) and modern high school (3 years), then Teachers Training College (beginning in 1329 / 1950), then the newly founded University of Mashad (graduated in 1338 / 1959), and finally left for Paris to study at Sorbonne on a government scholarship. After his graduation, he returned to Iran and gradually established himself as the leading ideologue of the Muslim youth of Iran. He finally left for Europe where he died under mysterious circumstances in England on June 9, 1977.

For many years after Shariati's birth, it seems, the family kept its ties with the ancestral village, Mazinan, where the young Ali spent his summer vacations in the company of the their old servant, "Shaghulam", who "remembered the reigns of seven kings". From this "Shaghulam", the young Shariati learns many things: "There must be two bridges over the river, so that those who come may not clash with those who go"; and "the throat of a rooster who crows untimely must be cut at once". And he makes mention of "Kadkhoda Hasan", the Village head, with his absurdly big moustache, whom some villages thought to be

famous and feared all over the world. Later in his life, Shariati expresses much admiration for the village, its glorious past, and its proud inhabitants, who looked down on the people of the city and referred to well-shaved modern men as "bearded women".¹¹

About the crisis of his early adolescence, he personally inform us that

. . . It was one of the first years of my puberty, [which were accompanied with] psychological philosophical crisis, because, fundamentally speaking, I began 'reading' with the books of Maurice Maeterlinck [1862-1949] and those inconclusive skeptical thoughts which made a genius like himself go mad. It is obvious what [Maeterlinck's arguments] can do to a twelve year old sixth grader. This intellectual diversity in the world of mysticism, which had attracted me so seriously in the days of immaturity, got so stormy that it was about to drive me mad. The years between 1325 and 1328 (1946-1949), [the Iranian] society had no goal. The chaos of the Tudeh Party and akhundism 12 had taken a new life . . . I belonged to the first category: absurdity, philosophical

pessimism, alienation from reality of life, lack of attachment to society, not having any responsibility, taking intellectual bites larger than the mouth of my mind . . . , and all these combined with the crisis of puberty made the path of Sadeq Hedayat¹³ [i.e. "suicide"] very tempting on those days.

In order to commit [suicide], at one point, a few hours after midnight, I crept out of the house, and began to walk toward Kuh-Sangi,¹⁴ I could see the pond within one hour distance. I could see myself happily drowned in the water. All of a sudden, my only reason for dependence to this world and life, Mathnawi¹⁵, made me think over my decision. "Life", I thought near the pond, "is nothing but a hollow imagination. Nevertheless, there is one good thing in it: one can have fun with Mathnawi, see the world with it, and grow". I returned [from the moment in which] life and death were of the same weight in the balance, thanks to Mathnawi, which made life heavier in weight than death . . . , I remained alive, and found my direction with the beginning of Nahzat -e- Melli (National

Movement).¹⁶

Unlike his father who had so many good things to say about his own mentors, Shariati often made sarcastic remarks about his high school teachers and the modern education they provided. Never in his life he regarded modern formal education serious, and, thanks to his father and his private library, he felt to be always "one hundred lessons ahead" of his classmates and "ninety-nine lessons ahead" of most of his teachers.¹⁷ Although Shariati is justifiably known as a bitter critic of the ulama, without a doubt, he preferred the simple, pious and spiritual atmosphere of the madrasahs, in which teaching and learning is sacred, to that of modern educational institutes, wherein knowledge is exchanged for financial security and access to luxury.¹⁸ As a rule, furthermore, it is as though Shariati only admired his "informal" teachers, those from whom he drew occasional inspirations.

In a high school notebook, he expresses his hatred for two words which begin with the letter "T": Tarikh (history) and Taqizadeh, one of the pioneers of modernism in Iran.¹⁹ Tarikh, particularly the history of Islam (more particularly that Shi'ism), he attempted to re-write and revolutionize, and his hatred for Taqizadeh, an archetype of "assimilated pseudointellectual" in his opinion, remained with him for

the rest of his life. True that Taqizadeh, like Shariati's father, had left the traditional garb of the ulama, but, unlike him, he had severed his relation with Shi'ite scholarship in pursuit of secularism. Change of garb (and occupation) on the old Shariati's part was nothing short of "dissimulation", which a combatant Shi'ite theologian had to do under Reza Shah in public arena. That was not all, however, and he wanted to have more freedom to advocate a more political and less traditional Shi'ism, an "ideological" Shi'ism.

But, in order to do so, the old Shariati needed a center outside the realm of the mullas, where ritual pollution of the non-Muslims (whom Muhammad Taqi frequently debated) would not disturb the pious. Beginning with an informal gathering in the house of friend, he finally persuades the public that a permanent and large place is needed for such activities. Before long, in 1320 / 1941 (the year Tudeh Party was founded), a year before Shaykh Abd al-Karim Ha'iri arrives in Qumm, Kanun -e- Nashr -e- Haqayeq -e- Islami (Center for Propagation of Islamic Truths) is established.

For more than thirty years in Mashad (since 1317-18 / 1938-39), my father worked hard. In each year of this period, he suffered as much as I have in my entire life. He worked hard and with sincerity. Relative to his time, his

thoughts were more progressive than mine. But, what was the result? He went to Kanun once in every two or three months. Only the "pretty" and "progressive" rowshanfekran ²⁰ would come in and sit down. My father would sweat for five hours [of lecturing]. Then, one word [among so many words] was enough to make one of these "misters" mad and to make him leave in protest. The expenses . . . ? Every attendant would be given a small glass of tea, once a week . . . Altogether 500-600 tomans. Sometimes the bills would remain unpaid for 5-6 months. No one had the generosity . . . One had to ask for donations . . . 100 tomans from this, 200 tomans from that. And with much humiliation and beggary! Then, only God saved me from developing an anti-religion complex. Otherwise, I would have kicked the whole thing away and had become an existentialist or a Marxist. Any other person in the same shoes would have developed the complex and thought of it as his duty to uproot this religion . . . Despite the fact that my father's vocal cords were badly damaged due to these long and loud lectures, . . . , he would scream in front of some ten thousand people . . . Everyone thought a loudspeaker and a recorder was needed . . . , but no one [donated the money]. Why? Because they were of the petit-bourgeoisie who worshipped their money. Their religion is a hateful and dirty one. Their very faith is filthy and base.²¹

As a high school student, like many other young men in Mashad, Shariati attended the sessions of Kanun, which he compares with another "religious society" of a different kind in the holy city:

Its leader was a glass-cutter . . . All of a sudden, due to a mental revolution, he had quit his job and entered the realm of religion. At the very time when the Kanun of the "progressive rowshanfekran" had no money for a few cups of tea, this man built twelve large buildings, each named after one of the Shi'ite Imams . . . For the occasion of the Mahdi's birthday, for instance, ordinary people, workers and the like, would lend him 50,000 canaries and 100,000 rugas for decoration . . . One year, the whole thing caught fire; the rugs and the canaries burned to ashes. [What do you think happened]? People gathered for thanking the Mahdi for having accepted their gifts. (If he had not accepted them, [like other years], they would be able to take them home). The leader asked people to appreciate his efforts in getting the gifts accepted! [And they did]. Look at the justification! Masses of people are so

generous. It is the middle-class which is so terrible. Its "belief" and "disbelief" is the same. Do you know where the misfortune of Islam lies? From the inception of this class. Ever since the time religion became dependent on this class; since a relation was established between theological seminaries and the bazaar.²²

Following the footsteps of his father, in 1330 / 1951, Shariati began teaching in elementary schools, and, like many in his generation, he continued his education. He soon occupied himself with translation from Arabic to Persian. In 1333 / 1954, he translated a long letter by Allamah Muhammad Husayn Kashif alGhita (1877-1954) addressed to Gerald Ivans Hopkins, then the vice president of American Friends of the Middle East in Lebanon, in which Kashif al-Ghita had expressed the grievances of the Muslim world against the capitalist West.²³ While it is perhaps true that Kashifa al-Ghita had taken AFME more serious than he should have, his response was a powerful Muslim declaration of neutrality and independence in American-Soviet cold war; it was the seed of "no to East, no to West, Islam is the best", later on one of the slogans of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Little wonder then that one of the editions of Khumayni's Islamic Government, perhaps the most widespread

one in pre-revolutionary Iran, "misinformed" the SAVAK (but not educated readers) that it was written by a certain "Ayatullah Kashif al-Ghita" i.e. "the Ayatullah who took the cover off [secrets]", a clear reference to Khomeini's *Kashf-e Asrar*.

In 1334 / 1955, Shariati produced a liberal translation of the Egyptian radical, Abdul Hamid Jawdat al-Sahhar's biography of Abudharr. In this book, a historical novelette of so sort, Jawdat al-Sahhar does not only portray Abudharr, a famous companion of the prophet of Islam, as a "Muslim socialist", who, on the basis of Muhammad's teachings, single-handedly rebels against economic injustice and, therefore, is exiled to barren desert by the ruler of his time. The story is in fact that of a young man of the deserts who, long before accepting Islam, rebels against the "idols" of his tribe, and is guided by his own intuition to the worship of Allah. Leaving his tribe for good, in Mecca, he discovers Muhammad and his new faith. From this point onward, Abudharr follows the footsteps of Muhammad everywhere. Not that his life is totally devoid of mistakes, but, he is always brought back to the straight path by his own sincerity. Despite his many services to Islam, his personal expectations are very low. Although he can, he never accepts a job in the government. He is, however, boldly "non-compromising" when the interest of the

community is at stake. After Muhammad's death, the sharp edge of his criticism is aimed at the caliph (Uthman), the jurist (Ka'bal-Ahbar, formerly a Jewish Rabbi), the king (Mu'awiyah), and the wealthy (Abd al-Rahman ibn awf). He interprets "property belongs to God" as "property belongs to the community" rather than "the property belongs to the caliph". And, he is "surprised why those who see poverty in their houses do not rebel against the society with sword". Finally, the caliph Uthman exiles Abudharr to the very desert which is full of bad memories of the days of savagery, ignorance and polytheism. Abudharr dies in complete loneliness.

Infatuated with Abudharr's life-story, Shariati subtitled his free and highly edited translation "Khoda Parast -e- Sosialist" (The God-worshipping Socialist), with definite connection to an underground organization with the same title (founded in 1944)²⁴. It enjoyed much popularity and was reprinted several times.²⁵ Thanks to Shariati, the name of Abudharr gradually emerged in Iran as the archetypal figure who combined old religious faith with modern radical socialism. Shariati's infatuation with the myth of Abudharr remained with him for the rest of his life and, at several occasions (last one in Mordad 1351), he managed to bring his play, "Encore, Abudharr", to the attention of thousands in Mashad and Tehran.²⁶

From this point onward, we also find Shariati fascinated with the physiologist Alexis Carrel (1873-1944) and his short polemic, "La Priere" (Supplication): Here was a modern physiologist speaking on the efficacy of "prayer", an issue so crucial in science-religion debates. Its translator in 1328 (1949), Kazem Ahmadzadeh, did not however consent to its publication, and Shariati had to wait until 1338 (1959) when he produced his own translation and published it alongside Mehdi Bazargan's comments on the nature of Islamic prayer.²⁷ Later on, Shariati is found to be fascinated with another polemic of Carrel, "Man, the Unknown", in which the author wonders why man studies everything except man. Strange as it seems, Shariati regards the physiologist as one of the founding fathers of anthropology!

In this early period as well, Shariati was engaged in writing creative religious literature. Inspired by Quran 24:35, one of the most metaphoric verses of the Quran, and under heavy influence of Mosaddeq's doctrine, Movazeneh -e- Manfi (Negative Balance), in 1334 (1955) he put forward the first portion of his Maktab -e- Vaseteh (The Middle Way School of Thought), according to which,

"between materialism and idealism, Islam has a method particular to itself which can be called 'realism'. The social and economic

regime of Islam is practical socialism based on Khoda-Parasti (worship of God); it is the midpoint between the corrupt regime of capitalism and that of communism which is Eshterakiyat -e- Motlaq (absolute common ownership). The political orientation of Islam in the international arena -- between the two antagonist blocs of the East (under the leadership of the Soviet Union) and the West (under the leadership of America), is a midbloc unrelated to the either side. It is a pure tree which is neither Eastern nor Western".²⁸

Shariati's short History of Evolution of Philosophy was published in the summer of 1334 (1955). In 1337 (1958), under the influence of Descartes, he wrote his own version of "Cogito Ergo Sum", and published it in the newspaper Farhang -e- Khurasan. His Maktab -e- Rabitah (Ideology of Interconnection), perhaps on the necessity of "pan-Islamism", and an article claiming that "it was Muslims who first discovered America" followed in 1336 (1957).

In 1336 (1957), for the first time in his life, he spent eight months in prison on political charges, namely support of Musaddeq (then exiled in his estate, Ahmadabad), and his "negative balance", which was curiously taken by his

religious supporters as the interpretation of "the light of Islam" which is la Sharqiyah" (non-Eastern) and la Gharbiya (non-Western).²⁹

After release from prison, Shariati, freshly graduated from University of Mashad, married Puran Shariat Razavi, the sister of a university student recently slain by the Shah's police³⁰ during Richard Nixon's visit to Tehran. In a letter to his wife, dated Ordibehest 1337 (April-May 1958), he writes:

Even the greatest sufferings are not able to take my silence and forbearance from me. Yet, the smallest bitterness does not leave me unless it makes a fire within me. Let me tell you about the sufferings -- which were dormant in these days, but have come to life again tonight . . . , in order to tranquilize them. My youth passed in the past six years when our society was filled with danger, suffocation, suffering and darkness. I sacrificed all my energy in the struggle against such atmosphere. It was a struggle which gave me nothing except tired nerves and perplexed thoughts. Nonetheless, I continued pursuing it. I did not let comfort and joy stop me from this maddening

attempt. I was going a way which was to end to [either of the] two things only: death and fame. Hard work and danger have been my permanent friends; they never left me for a moment. I have been attached to both of them.

Last year, . . . I decided to continue my way, as crazy as ever before . . . I did things which I shall tell you in proper time: one day for arson, destruction, lecturing, strike, publication of books and pamphlets, and planning for secret and underground organizations; the other day in the dark prison cell under torture, and being hostage to unknown destiny. Finally, they took me to Tehran (prison). When I was freed, all my companions left me; they were afraid. Not even five of them were any longer ready to help me . . . Suddenly, someone gave me the glad-tidings of a trip to Beirut, where I will have an adventurous and sensational future. He told me that, there, I can continue the way that I have begun here (and, no one has followed me), and I can devote all my energy and talent to advancing my school

of thought. In this trip, I was (sic)
predicting ninety percent death and ten
percent victory"31

The published version of this letter is highly censored by editors; we do not what happened exactly that, instead of going to Beirut, Shariati set out for education in Paris in 1959, on government scholarship. According to his father, it was the rule in Mashad University to send the "best student" to the Sorbonne.³²

IN PARIS:

Despite the fact that he provides much scattered information about his memories of Paris, the details of his life and study in Paris are not known any better than the rest of his life. On the first day of his arrival, he himself informs us, he looks for a copy of Alexis Carrel's "La Priere", which he begins to translate immediately. He studies French.³³ At one point, on January 14, in the cafe' of Place Bastille, while everyone else is dancing and enjoying the music, he is seen bitterly crying in silence and solitude, for no apparent reason. At another point, in Perfecteure Prison, for three days and nights, he speaks to a political inmate, Monsieur Gilleuse³⁴. There is a bookseller, Claude Bernarde, whom he frequently visits, and they like each other very much³⁵. He makes frequent visits to "Observateure" Garden, where he sits for hours of thinking.³⁶ "Western civilization", "this metal monster which is standing on top of gold and sex" brings the thought of suicide to his mind, but he already knows the cure for such weakness: Mathnawi, which he calls for from Iran. After reading Mathnawi,

Like a weak kid walking beside a
neighborhood tough man, or near a companion
or a kin, who is not afraid of any policeman,
biting dog, thief, knife man . . . , like a

situation in which a kid looks down on everyone, because I had read the poems of the great Maulana the night before, in the morning, when I had to deal with Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche, Sartre, Sorbonne, College de France, professors, the golden civilization . . . , I had a princely, philosophical and gentle smile on my lips.³⁷

He claims to have studied under the sociologist George Gurvitch (1894-1965) for five years³⁸ and to have had close companionship of the Islamicist, Louis Massignon (1883-1962), from whom he drew much inspiration, if not much education³⁹. In fact he refers to a large number of "inspirers", and it is not clear which ones were his real teachers. According to an oral report from a close friend of his who also attended the Sorbonne at the same time, he rarely attended his classes. The popular belief is that he received two Ph.D.s, one in sociology and the other in philosophy of history or history of Islam.⁴⁰ It is obvious by now that he wrote his somewhat insignificant doctoral dissertation on Persian philology⁴¹, and that, under Professor Lazard, whom Shariati never referred to publicly. He claims to have wished to study "philosophy or [literary] criticism", but he was forced by a sense of responsibility to study, sociology, what he considered to be most useful

for the people from whose pocket his scholarship had come.⁴²

There is no question, however, that he had considerable sociological insight which he applied to Islam, albeit much less formal sociological education than his admirers have claimed for him⁴³. Indeed, he had picked up a few flowers from every garden and, therefore, had many clashing and overlapping "dimensions" -- as he calls them. Men of different persuasions had influenced his thought; he could cite diverse personalities such as Ali, Abudharr, Pascal, Proudhon, Sartre . . . to prove his point. And this, no doubt, required a great deal of eclectic talent, the talent which has made the works of Shariati so poetical and artistic. "Permanent revolution" and "dialectics" from Gurvitch, "charismatic leadership" (which he later on applied to the concept of imamat) and the contrast between "movement and institution" (which he skillfully used to distinguish between "Alavid" and "Safavid" Shi'ism) from Max Weber, "mystical approach" (which he often used in his Keviriyat: romantic writing for the sake of "forgetting"; not "remembering") from Massignon, "interpretive sociology" (which he applied to whatever necessitating symbolic interpretation) from John Berque, "philosophy of history" and awareness of time from Karl Marx (which he applied to history of Islam), "alienation" and "assimilation" (which he applied to culture) from Sartre, Marcuse, Fanon and African

thinkers, and much more, are the main flavors of his later argument. In the whirlpool of his mind, however, none of what he had learned remained a solid piece. Although he did not apparently write much poetry in his life⁴⁴, he was a poet in the sense that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were, and the with the "excess" that so vividly marks the works two philosophers. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche excluded in particular, he had "many", rather than "one or a handful" inspirers, and a few have ever managed to be influenced by so many or to be as eclectic as he was; and all to the same end: reviving "Islam" as a "working ideology". While in Paris, Shariati became heavily involved in student politics, both Iranian and international. At the beginning, it seems, he enters a circle of Iranians who are not in good terms with Islam and its clergymen; he voices his sarcastic objection⁴⁵. In 1961, in a lecture entitled "On What Shall We Lean?", he called for "return to Islam". In August 1962, he was chosen editor of Iran -e- Azad (Free Iran), the organ of Iranian Student Confederation, then dominated by Muslims rather than communists, in which he writes under the pen name "Sham'" (candle), which stands for "Shariati, Ali, Mazinani". In the same year, the sudden death of his mother made him temporarily return to Iran and be, quite accidentally, acquainted with "Iranian Liberation Movement". Upon his return to Europe, in September of the same year, he

helped establish the chapter of Iranian Liberation Movement in exile, the religious wing of "Iranian National Front" established by Bazargan and Taleqani, following the death of Ayatullah Borujerdi (1292-1380 / 1875-1960). He wrote as critic of Iranian politics and even as early as January 16, 1963, he theorized, albeit prematurely, about armed struggle against the Shah's regime, and proposed that a group of students should quit school and train for guerrilla warfare instead.⁴⁶

He supported Algerian Revolution and served a short term in jail for his support of Patrice Lumumba. In this period he translated some works of Frantz Fanon, "Les Damnés de la Terre" (which Shariati published as a series of articles in Andisheh -e Jebheh ⁴⁷, last portion 1342/ 1964), and "L' An V de la Revolution Algerienne" (A Dying Colonialism) in particular, and Che Guevara's "Guerrilla Warfare".⁴⁸ Several letters were exchanged between him and Fanon, on the issue of religion. Fanon had argued that religious identity divides the oppressed masses, and Shariati tried to prove an exceptional case for Islam.⁴⁹ If there is one piece which, in its entirety, captured Shariati's mind forever, it must be Sartre's long and moving "introduction" to Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth", a piece in which Shariati saw his own prophetic mission as a third world intellectual.

Something of his sarcastic remarks on Shah's "White Revolution" and on the position some ulama, Ayatullah Chehelsotuni in particular, had taken vis-a-vis the revolution, has survived in writing, but it is nothing considerable, except that he combines his criticism of the Shah and the mullas.⁵⁰

RETURN TO IRAN:

By the time Shariati was ready to return to Iran, he had developed a practical plan for social (not political) revolution which later on proved effective: the traditional molds (guarded by society in general and by the clergy in particular) had to be broken, the eroding acid of "Westomania" (advocated by "pseudointellectuals" in general and the government in particular) had to be cast aside, Islam had to be reconstructed and presented as a new ideology for sociopolitical action, and a new leadership, different and independent from "barren" leaderships of the traditionalists and the modernists, was to develop by those who had broken the molds.⁵¹ Shariati had realized that armed struggle by itself and before any revolution within personal "self" of the members of the society is not desirable.

More clearly, he realized that his self-imposed prophetic mission must be carried out in many fronts: with the help of like-minded people (actual or potential), he

must struggle against all the manifestations of both, "decadent traditionalism" and "eroding modernism", in order to create a new breed of man, whose self-image should be deeply rooted in "heritage of Shi'ism", his own brand of Shi'ism.

At least from this point to the end of his life, Shariati advocates a sort of Shi'ite "Protestantism", which generally tends toward increasing radicalism with passage of time.

Generally speaking, he wishes to free Islam from "institution" and transform it back to a "movement" or an "ideology" for what he calls "return to self". In order to do so, he sets himself up for a very unequal battle against fourteen centuries of establishment, some parts of which are extremely sensitive.

Upon his return to Iran in 1343 (1964), which coincided with "15th of Khordad" aftermath and the exile of Khumayni to Turkey, he was arrested and imprisoned for six months, again on political charges: he was, reportedly, carrying a batch of "illegal" literature with him.⁵² After his release, he began teaching as a high school teacher in Turuq, the suburb of Mashad, in 1344 /1965, because there was apparently no university job available for him.⁵³ Meanwhile he sought a publisher for his translation of "Salman Pak et Les Premices Spirituelle de l'Islam Iranien",

written by Louis Massignon, and looked for a position in Tehran University.⁵⁴ The story of his trip to Tehran draws our attention to his considerable sensitivity:

Salman was finally published in Mashad, each copy "unreasonably" priced 65 Rials! In his "Totem Parasti" (Mashad, 1347 / 1968), he expresses his bitterness in face of that fact that "the result of 28 years of Massignon's work... plus the result of one year⁵⁵ of my day and night work" (both must be taken with a grain of salt) must be sold at such a low price. Not only that,

"one day, I was standing there. With my very own eyes I saw a 'customer' who had just bought some bread and meat... He bought a copy of "Salman" at 50 Rials, and he put it in his meat bag! I did not realize what happened to me . . . After some time, when I opened my eyes, I realized that it was 2 or 3 a.m., and that I was squatting in the corner of my office, smoking a cigarette. I had forgotten to turn the light on. I was giving myself consolation, as though someone in my family had just died "This is Mashad", I was telling myself, "and one should not have great expectations . . . Here, near the pile of millions of

endowments, the honorable students of theology must live on a budget less than that of an American chicken. [And even in Tehran], how are people supposed to know the difference between a good book and a bad one? Unless some big guy such as ... tells them".⁵⁶

In this bitter story, Shariat takes the liberty of attacking all these "big guys": the writers of "Rahnama ye Ketab" (a magazine of literary criticism put out by Iraj Afshar), Hermann Ethe, Edward G. Browne, Taqizadeh, Foruzanfar (a scholar of considerable originality on history, literature, mysticism etc.) and Purdavud (an expert of Zoroastrian texts and pre-Islamic Iran) are just a few. And, Edward Browne, for instance, is "His holiness, the Orientalist, the Islamicist, the Iranologist, the grand mufti, the great leader, the crown of imitation, his majesty the glorious master, Edward Browne, May his grave remain holy". And, poor Purdavud gets no less than one page of these sarcastic attributes!

Nonetheless, Shariati, who refuses to pay tribute to any of these "big guys", takes his "Salman" to Tehran, to an old friend, who is both, educated and pious, and has a bookshop. For a long time, they talk about the evils of modernism such as miniskirts, micro-miniskirts, pajama

parties etc. Realizing his friend is a man of social commitment (he speaks French too), Shariati gives a lengthy description of Massignon and his work. The man takes the book, gives its price tag a strange look, goes to the back of his shop, and brings the balance: "45 Rials", "50 Rials at the most", is his response after weighing.

"In anger and disgust, I jumped out of the shop. It was as though all this dirty capital was running around my head . . . Seeing the passers by filled my heart with hatred and revenge. In particular, the face of an a la mode girl who was so happy to have shown something above her knees to the passers by . . .

Or, that ...boy who, like an enema, passed her back and forth to show his . . . chest to her! It is this kind of people whom I expect to know and understand me! To them, I want to introduce Massignon! . . . It was as though everyone was picking on me: every cough was a bullet aimed at my heart; every laughter pierced my bones.

I passed through Shahabad Street and entered Baharestan Square, expecting to have more fresh air and less of these faces . . .

All of a sudden, I saw the sign "Central Office for Studies and Plans". . . I remembered the sad and funny days when I was an "expert in managerial skills" for the ministry of education . . . I felt I had lost all my energy, as though I was a heavy corpse upon my own shoulder . . . From that scene, I escaped to the building of the "Majlis", where I remembered all the events of the past sixty years: manly moustaches, dusty fur hats, genuine and sincere faces of Sattarkhan, the henna color beard and the skullcap of Ali Monsieure, the baker of Tabriz -- with his two children, 14 and 15, all put on a cart to be taken out of the city for hanging. And Ali Monsieure was still giving his sons consolation: "Do not be sad! Within a half an hour, we will be freed from the harm of these evil ones" . . . Yes, the whole story, from then to the present -- the time when "Salman" is put on the balance! . . . I escaped to the corner cafe, where I sat for an hour, or rather, many hours.

The sun finally set. And what a brutal and merciless night! I visited several

shops to see what kind of books are bought and sold. Total disappointment! . . . I went to "Masjid -e Hedayat", a clean mosque with clean and enlightened worshipers. I wanted to enter to sit down and determine who really I was. At the gate, there was a table, filled with many good books. "Don't you have 'Salman'"? I asked. The old bookseller jumped. "What do you want it for"? he said. "To read", I said. With the authoritative voice and smile of a jurist or a philosopher, he said, "This is not a kind of book which can do you any good". "Why"? I said. He seemed hesitant to say any more. Finally, he said: "Yes - its translator says things which - yes- are not in accord with - yes - somewhat - in other words - are wrong - it is deviated - it is not good for young people -- . . . And, its author is a foreigner. How do the foreigners know our Salman? They put bits and pieces together. And our youth think whatever a foreigner says is right. Yes - the translator, however, is a nice young man - but - yes -"! ⁵⁷

To make the long story short, within a few days, Shariati learns that the bookseller (his old friend) has told the clergy that the book is a bad one, and that it should be declared forbidden. Not only the pious "blind followers", but the "freethinkers" as well, refuse to read the book, but, each and everyone of them has an "opinion" -- which is the same as that of the bookseller. Shariati gets two independent feedbacks only, both from teachers, both negative, even irrelevant.

Why must "Salman" be rejected in Iran? Shariati has his opinion in 1355 / 1976:

. . . Massignon is the first person to free Islamology from Orientalism, which is dependent on colonialism . . . All those attached to colonialism, therefore, turned against him. They decided to use "conspiracy of silence" against him . . . His "Salman", the result of 27 years of work, was not translated. In 1935, Taqizadeh signed a contract with the ministry of education to translate it. He did not translate it. He died. In other words, by signing the contract, he prevented others from translating it. [People like him] know what to do. Orientalism and Islamology was the

monopoly of the freemasons. Someone like me should not have poked his nose into their business! . . . When "Salman" was published, unlike the rest of my books which spread quickly, I got stuck with this one! No one bought it . . . I was, however, proud to have carried out an anti-freemason mission . . . To hell with them! I revived Massignon. I revived "Salman". This book was most dear to me among all my books. I published it in Mashad . . . I had no money to pay for its publication: 5000-6000 tomans. I gave the whole thing to a bookseller, telling him that I did not want any money for my work. A few days later, I realized that he had traded some 500-600 copies of it with [a trashy novel called] "I Wept Too" . . . I took the books from him and headed for Tehran.⁵⁸

Shariati is in Tehran for another purpose, too: getting a job in Tehran University. He must pass an examination in order to qualify as "assistant professor", and he does. But this is not the only thing. For some reason, the professor in charge of hiring has "something against those who have studied in France". A bitter argument takes place between him and the professor.

". . . I felt myself being squeezed to death . . . I became a spark and said 'your excellency! you judge me -- a person in your presence and his file available to you -- so precisely and accurately! Wondrous must be your study of personalities of the distant and obscure past! Given your method, the students must benefit a great deal from your historical studies and ideas!' He, who had been sitting up to then, all of a sudden shouted and jumped, like a scholar wounded by a bullet, and attacked. I had been standing politely, but then I sat down and lit a cigarette, telling him with fear, 'I am not leaving this room. This is my room as much as it is yours. Except if, according to the old tradition . . . whoever I am and whoever you may be, for the sake of my self-acquittal, I say, right here where your colleagues are present as judges, I will give you a text that I have translated. I do not demand that you read and understand it; I only demand that you read it correctly. If you did, not only I no longer ask for assistantship in this university but also I

will free you from my trouble forever; I will throw myself out of the window. I am no man if I don't! The argument arose. He told me to get the hell out of there, and I told him with humiliating phrases to "read it!" The students poured out of classroom to see what is going on. Seeing that their professor is badly stuck with an impolite young man, they cheered and clapped . . ."⁵⁹

From this disappointing trip, Shariati returns to Mashad.

Although sensitivity seems to have been a constant part of his nature, even though "search for identity" is quite visible in his early writings as well, after his return to Iran, Shariati was never able to totally overcome the strange feeling of "being an alien in one's own homeland" and to get used to its intellectual environment. Without a doubt, he returned to Iran with great expectations, namely, to get a desirable job, to find an audience for his new thoughts, and to be taken seriously. Instead, he is welcomed, first by a humiliating jail sentence, then by refusal of a proper job in Tehran University, and finally by the general intellectual environment which refuses to pay tribute to a newcomer. But, granted none of these would have happened, it is naive to think that Shariati would have

been happy, even less unhappy. What could possibly make him happy did

not exist at all. He often found refuge in eulogizing, elegizing and lamenting "Louis Massignon", who had died two years before Shariati's return to Iran. Odd as it may seem, I am of the opinion that for him "Louis Massignon" was something like Nietzsche's "Zarathustra".

Much of his complex tragic feeling, however, is expressed with a great deal of boldness and literary skill in his Kevir. More importantly, as though having a divine mission, he set himself up against the entire universe with which he was unable to cope.

In 1345 / 1966, he published his "Rahnama ye Khurasan" (guide to Khurasan) in three languages: Persian, Arabic and French. The same year, he was invited by Ferdowsi University of Mashad to fill a vacancy as instructor of history. Only a portion of his class notes, belonging to Aban 1348 (October-November 1969), on the methodology of writing the history of "Iran: from Islam to Safavid period", has survived ⁶⁰. Between 1966 and 1970, he taught sociology as well, mainly on the issue of "alienation"⁶¹, at Ferdowsi University of Mashad. His teaching was altogether less of systematic university lecturing and more of pouring one's heart out. The star of his fame and popularity began to gradually rise, not because of his reputation as a good

teacher, but thanks to his public lecture which attracted enthusiastic crowds.

Much of his works in this period has reached us, the most important being his "Islamshenasi" (1347 / 1968, which was severely attacked by the clergy, Nasser Makarem of Qumm in particular, as a "non-Shi'ite" ("not Shi'ite enough") version of the history early Islam (see Fischer 1980:168-9). In a Shi'ite country where only a few seem broad-minded enough to hear anything positive said about the Sunni caliphs, if only Shariati would have based his work on Shi'ite sources and had shared his Shi'ite hatred of the "false" caliphs, Abu-Bakr, Umar and Uthman, more bluntly! Few books in Iran have been target of so much misunderstanding.

In Esfand 1346 (March 1968), he was supposed to accompany a group of his "history" students on a "scientific trip" to Iraq. At the last minute, however, for some reason unknown to me, he does not "succeed". Since his colleagues were going to celebrate Nowruz (the Iranian New Year: March 21) on the trip, he wrote an article for them to be read for the occasion. In no other short piece of contemporary Persian literature, the spirit of Nowruz has been so well put in the complex context of Iranian Shi'ism: Nowruz, Shariati argues, is not only the first day of the spring and, therefore, the most natural day for celebration, but,

during Imam Ali's life, it coincided with the day when Muhammad declared Ali as his own legitimate successor. Once, during the reign of the Safavid king, Shah Abbas, Nowruz and Ashura coincided with each other; the king ordered his subjects to mourn on the day and celebrate Nowreuz on the following day.⁶²

For the first time, in 1348 (1969), Shariati published a collection of articles, mainly concerned with his own "identity", under the title Kevir, which embodies the essence of his romantic preoccupations: First, the peculiar title, Kevir (barren desert), with references to his own "hometown" and "homeland", a place where only the toughest trees can "grow in hell", if they can go deep enough to reach moisture; and where the eyes can see the farthest distance on all sides without confronting any obstacle. Second, a quotation from "Ecclesiastes", which marks the first page of the book: "You know the heart of an alien, because you used to be an alien in the land of Egypt". Third,

"In my escape into history from the loneliness of the present, I found my brother Ayn al-Qudat⁶³ who, at the beginning of his blossoming, was tortured to death by burning candles at the age of 33, his crime being awareness, sensitivity and intellectual

boldness. Indeed, in the reign of ignorance, awareness is a crime. In the assembly of the meek and the debased, loftiness of soul and courage of heart, being an island amidst the lakes (as Buddha has said), is an unforgivable sin. So often I read a bath al-shakwa⁶⁴ of my own, thinking it must be his writing, and so often I read one of his, thinking it must be mine".⁶⁵

And here is what Ayn al-Qudat (indeed Shariati) writes:

"Whatever I write, it is as though my heart was not pleased. And about most of what I have written these days, I am not sure whether I should have or should not have. O my friend! One should not say all what is good and right . . . I should not throw myself into a sea whose shores are not visible. And write things in [the state of] 'selflessness', for which I feel sorry and sick when 'I return to myself'. O my friend! I fear -- and there is context for fear from the trick of destiny . . . Truly -- and take an oath on your friendship, I am not sure whether, by writing, I am walking on the path of salvation or wretchedness. Truly, I

am not sure whether my writing amounts to sin or good deeds. If only I would suddenly turn into an ignorant man and free from myself!

. . . If I write, I should not: if I do not write, I should: whether I say or keep silent, whether I say or do not say, is not right!" 66

It is not known why Shariati identified himself with the mystic martyr; possibilities are many, and "intellectual loneliness" is the strongest. Kevir, however, is concerned with "personal feelings" of Shariati, something which he "distinguishes" from his *ijtima'iyat*, "social writings", ("which people like") and from *Islamiyat* ("which both people and I are pleased with"). To what extent these "three categories" are independent of each other, is open to inconclusive debate. More importantly, Kevir is Shariati's "autobiography" and "hysterical self-analysis" in the sense that *Buf -e Kur* is for Hedayat. But, unlike Hedayat who wrote for his own shadow and cared less about who said what, Shariati was very sensitive, even to his hypothetical and potential critics, and, he devoted the first chapter of Kevir to responding to what "they shall say".

Another piece of his *Islamiyat* (or rather *Ijtima'iyat*) must have been his highly provocative introduction to the

biography of the Shi'ite hero, "Hujr ibn Adi", written by Hasan Akbari Marznak, an old friend of Shariati, with whom he had shared prison cell in 1336 (1957). In fact, reading this introduction makes the self-imposed mission of Shariati, for the years to come, quite clear. Not so much because Shariati speaks of Hujr, a Shi'ite who literally walks towards his own death by taking a trip to Damascus ⁶⁷, but mainly because he draws attention to an ideological gap, which must be filled with the similar stories of Shi'ite heroic personalities. Since "the scholars should have done this long time ago, but they did not", since there is virtually no useful books on Islam, it is the responsibility of the "enlightened" to overcome this shortcoming.

In this introduction as well, by drawing attention to anecdotes of Faza'el -e Balkh and the contents of Ziyart -e Ashura⁶⁸ Shariati preaches both "negative" protest and "armed struggle" at the same time.

The period between 1968 and 1973 must be considered the most productive years of Shariati's life in public lecturing. He continued to lecture, albeit informally for the most part, at different universities, mosques and particularly at his de facto headquarters, Husayniyeh Ershad, in Tehran, an institute founded by a group of Muslim intellectuals under the patronage of a rich philanthropist in 1965. ⁶⁹

Outside Mashad, the star of Shariati's fame does not first shine in Tehran, but in Abadan, where, in 1347 (1968), he delivers a series of lectures in "Petroleum University" under the titles "Man and Islam" (where he provides the symbolic interpretation of the myth of Adam), "World-view" (where, after defining the term, he argues how one's world-view effects one's vision of the world), "Extraction and Purification of Cultural Resources" (where he puts particular emphasis on national culture and the possibility and the necessity of reinterpreting its elements), "Four Prisons of Man" (where he discusses the limitations of human existence and thought in social context), "Cone of Cultural Sociology" (where he graded humanity in terms of awareness: brains on top; masses at the bottom), "Ideology", and finally, a question and answer period under the titles "Mission of the Enlightened For Reconstructing Society". (All are published in one volume under the title "Man and Islam" and, since the volume is already translated into English, no further comment is necessary at this point⁷⁰). I shall nonetheless try to summarize his interpretation of the myth of Adam, an essential of his "anthropology":

For Shariati, definitely not a creationist, "Adam" is not the first human being; "it" is a symbol for "man", male and female. "Eve" symbolizes "love"; "the serpent" is "intelligence; the "forbidden fruit" is "consciousness".

The myth draws our attention to the existential nature of man, a two-dimensional creature made of the "lowliest" (dirt) and the "most sublime" (God's spirit). This "dialectical" creature does not only have two types of need (material and spiritual) which must be met, but, it has the potential of becoming the lowest of the low or the highest of the high. It is a creature who is blessed with "consciousness", "choice" and "will". He is above the angels; he is the vice-regent of God on the face of the earth. "Eating from the forbidden tree" is not an original sin, but a "divine conspiracy" to put the heavy burden of responsibility on man's shoulders. Expelled from the garden of Eden, man is on his own; like a child expelled by his parents, man must shape his own destiny on earth. "Anxiety" is his constant companion, and, in this earthy exile, he often craves for return to his heavenly origin. This sums up Shariati's existentialist "anthropology".

One of his first successful university lectures in Tehran must have been "Existentialism", delivered at National University in 1347 / 1968-71. He particularly concentrated on Sartre who had become popular in Iran through his writings recently translated. Popular existentialism, we must note, had a long time ago been introduced in Iran. Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" had been translated, albeit often read for a wrong reason.

The educated book readers were familiar with the names of Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and works of Dostoevsky. Albert Camus was quite popular, thanks to Ali Ahmad and others. Although Hedayat had translated a short story of Sartre, the introduction of his works into Iranian intellectual circles had to await for some time. He was however awarded by a sudden storm of translations. To this one may add that all existentialist literature had become a daily cafe past time for the disenchanted bourgeois intellectuals. It is not without reason that Shariati quoted Sartre,

" My existentialism does not belong to cafes; those who want to run away from life and responsibility should not seek refuge in this school of thought. On the contrary, [my existentialism] as the school of praxis, responsibility . . . and creativity".⁷²

and he concluded:

"Vis-a-vis dialectical materialism which considers man as a toy in the hands of historical determinism, vis-a-vis naturalism which understands man as merely a . . . natural being . . . , vis-a-vis Marxism which imagines the cure of man's sufferings to be

an economic solution . . . , vis-a-vis
 nihilisms and pessimisms based on [the notion
 of] absolute absurdity of the world . . .
 existentialism is the most excellent school
 of thought . . . But . . .

because it shows

no definite way, responsibility and example
 which all people can believe in and seriously
 feel responsible toward. it is a weak
 school.")⁷³

Aban 1st, 1347 (October 23, 1968), in a lecture,
 entitled "The New Muslim Generation", he called attention to
 a newly emerging generation of Muslims whose
 spiritual/religious needs are drastically different from
 those of their traditional parents. If their thirst is not
 quenched by Islam, he argued, they are bound to turn to
 other ideologies.

Aban 3&9 1347 (October 25 and 31, 1968), he lectured on
 the method of understanding Islam. In order to understand a
 religion, one must investigate five aspects of it: its God
 or gods, the personality of its founder, its book, the
 manner of its social orientation and finally the exemplary
 personality that this religion has produced.⁷⁴ In these
 lectures, he comments on the social implications of
 monotheism, develops the character of Muhammad as the

founder of Islam, introduces the Quran as a book of guidance (rather than a holy object which must only be kissed and recited with melody), and he mentions Ali and Abudharr as two exemplary personalities Islam has produced. In Esfand 13-15th 1347, in a highly emotional lecture entitled "Ali , a Truth Resembling a Myth", he introduced "Imam Ali" as the exemplary personality produced by Islam. It is not enough, he argued, that a Shi'ite should love Ali, praise him in poetry, and expect his intercession on the Day of Judgment, but, more importantly, one must follow his example, for, he is an "imam" (example).

Criticism of this brand of Islam grew faster than expected. At one point in 1347-48 (1968-69), in a (now highly censored) piece, he explains his mental state in general and his dissatisfaction with his "first" "Islamshenasi", published few months before (and target of much criticism), in particular:

Despite my efforts to make known
the true character of Islam in
"Islamshenasi", and despite the praise that
this book has received, it is evident that I
have not been that successful. These
writings, and particularly the portion of its
Islamology are my oral lessons in 1345-46 /
1966-67, i.e. those of two years ago.

Besides this, they were exclusive to the classroom. Thirdly, the situation, i.e. the political conditions on the one hand and the base and foolish religious zeal on the other, made the book look unworthy in my eyes. It is for this reason that last year when 280 pages of it got published, in the second half of [the academic] year, i.e. from Esfand of last year, its publication was suddenly stopped.

I experienced a sudden transformation. The portrait of Islam suddenly changed in my view to the extent that I doubted whether I should continue. I was too depressed to finish what I was working so hard on. Ramadhan of last year, I had decided to finish its publication within a month. Every day I published a sixteen-page portion and every night I stayed awake till five or six in the morning . . . Who was able to understand me? With whom I could speak of this pain? How could the Islamic scholars in whose brain the religious images and concepts have been frozen for the past fourteen centuries understand that during the six

months which have passed from its publication (beginning in Mehr or Aban 1347), my ideas have changed, and I have new ideas; and the image of Islam and the meaning of religion have completely changed in my mind and every day new meanings make the old look like five centuries old!? Who could believe this? How could I continue what had already ended within me? How can hand write something while heart is cooking something else? . . . I can of course refrain from saying what I believe, but I can never write or say something against my belief; if I could, I would have a different fate today. Sometimes when my father insisted that I should change a sentence, I was unable to persuade myself; how could I then continue what I was not in the mood for? The ideas which I have discovered after publishing Islamshenasi are so fresh, delicate and beautiful that their joy is not even credible for myself. They cannot be publicized in Iran and under current conditions. The Akhunds, the guardians of Islam on the one hand and the government and animal-like people on the

other have besieged
 me from three sides. I cannot breathe. I am
 of the decision to write them in French and
 publish them in Europe⁷⁵; this is, if I had
 the right feeling and mood. At the present,
 continuation of a logical and precise work
 seems impossible for me. I talk in delirium.
 As much as the students have distressed me
 and have smashed my nervous system, I cannot
 think well. The Bath al-Shakwa epistle which
 I had begun on Ayn al-Qudat . . . took such a
 form that made me pessimistic about myself.
 I panicked, and felt deeply concerned and
 worried about myself . . . I have to rest
 during Nowruz vocation. I should not do or
 write anything . . . Maybe I will feel
 better. ⁷⁶

What modifications one was to expect if Shariati was to
 write another "Islamshenasi"? He gives us no more than a
 few glimpses on his "possible" points of departure: Islam
 is a Semite religion, and it has the characteristics of the
 Semite race: swift in anger, sensitive, one-dimensional and
 impatient. (He gives examples from Arabic poetry, music
 etc., which he contrast with "Iranian and Indian" poetry and
 music etc.). He compares Ahuramazda with Jehovah, and

Zoroaster with Moses. He points how the Semite says "such and such is either 'bad' or 'good', 'beautiful' or 'ugly'", but the Aryan says "it is good from this point of view and bad from that point of view"; how the Semite is "outwardly" and the Aryan "inwardly"; how the Aryan "bears with" injustice (India under colonial rule for a century), but the Semite rebels impatiently (35 years colonization of the Arabs is accompanied with continuous rebellion); how the Semite is "realist" and the Aryan "idealist" . . .

This argument leads nowhere but to "heresy", and hence:

" . . . When I speak of the Islam of Iran, when I point at Iranian Muslim, I am speaking of a third reality, which is neither Iran nor Islam. For, after Islam transmigrated into Iranian soul and made a revolution in its depth, Islam itself changed: it lost many of its racial characteristics. Likewise, Iran forgot many of her own ancient and well-rooted racial characters. Therefore, one must say, Muslim Iranians, i.e. Shi'ites, are neither antique Iranians nor Semite Muslims. [The Islam of Iran] is a modern wave, born of this wondrous historical marriage, a unique phenomenon in the entire history". ⁷⁷

Not clear enough? He defines Shi'ism as a "rendezvous of Aryan and Semite souls". The piece, which has accidentally escaped the knife of "well-intentioned Islamic censorship", clearly reveals Shariati's serious intellectual (and mental) crisis of the period. In the middle of his plan for a "deeper Islamshenasi", for instance, all of a sudden, he remembers Massignon, for no apparent reason. The reader may in fact be reminded of Rumi's teaching session in Kunia interrupted by Shams Tabrizi . . .

I personally am one of very distinguished examples of exceptional individuals who, among faces, voices, words, looks, spirits and men of different color who, in a line as long as the days of my life have marched in front of me, was so attracted to one without knowing what kind magnet was with him: I can no longer remember, feel and imagine myself without remembering, feeling and imagining him. We have known each other for 12 years.⁷⁸ Day by day, I go more crazy for him. I love him so much that sometimes I think my soul is too tight for his love, that love is bound to ooze out of it, and that my heart is about to explode . . . I suffer very badly. I wish very much to cry a little

bit, and to cry loudly too, in order to give myself consolation. But, I am embarrassed. People, I am afraid, will say: "Look at this old baby crying for his teacher! Is he a kindergarten kid or a high school girl? Who is Massignon? What is this?" I am so afraid of this! I am so afraid that they are going to say these things to "me", to "him", to "us". It is difficult. I think if my ears hear these one day, my eyes will go blind and my legs will cripple. It is six years since he is gone. And Oh! My Massignon! Angel of my loneliness! How much bitterness I suffer without you! In these six years, I have been writing constantly. My fingers have not left the pen, even for a moment. In your absence, my pen is the only possible consolation I have. [Only my pen] can milden the brutality and ruthlessness of these days . . . What would I do, if I did not have this Divan of Shams and this Arjang of Mani?⁷⁹ Since that year, I went to that alley twice: "2 Rue Monsieur", Massignon's address; his precise address. I saw his car, like an Arabian horse, the very lucky

automobile which embraced him all the time, was parked there, but he himself was no longer there . . .

What a bad time it is! The worst! The more time passes by, the more I wish to be an elementary school student, a snoopy and naughty kid who bothered his teachers, and angered the principal and the superintendent. Then, on break, I would be taken to office. My ears would be twisted. My hands and legs would be punished. Then I would be let go. Then I would do it again . . . No anxiety, no problem, no responsibility, nothing!

[Alas!], a heavy and meaningless burden is instead put on my shoulder. Even though my mind is filled with naughtiness, I must cover it under a mask as gentle as death and piety of nothingness. "Learn drinking water from an ass, and learn walking from a cow", such is the wisdom of all times and the tradition of society! What sort of things one must learn, and from whom! What examples one must follow in order to be loved by everyone! What can I say?⁸⁰

This state of mental discomfort notwithstanding, 1348 (1969) was fruitful year in Shariati's life. On Ordibehasht 19th, 1348 (May 9th 1969), in Mashad, he lectured in "Society Of High School Teachers of Social Sciences" of Khurasan, under the title Tamaddon va Tajaddod (civilization vs. modernization), which he apparently repeated once again in Ershad.⁷⁵ He spoke on cultural "assimilation" and "alienation", and "universal consumerism" as the major force responsible for such evils. In short, according to him, it is the universal spirit of consumerism, developed by "machines", which, through a systematic process of "assimilating" and "alienating, has been trying for some time to universalize Western values and feed it to the world, underdeveloped countries in particular, in order to create market for its overproduction. Third world "intellectuals" have the responsibility of providing public awareness.

In this lecture, Shariati defined his key terms: rowshanfekr, an inadequate synonym for "intellectual", he redefined as "the one who is conscious of his own situation humaine . . . whose consciousness has given him the sense of responsibility. He is a responsible self-conscious who has the responsibility of scientific, social and revolutionary leadership of his society". "Assimilation", he did not have to define; the jurisprudence

term Tashabboh beh Koffar (making oneself look like unbelievers) conveys the familiar meaning to a considerable extent: One should not dress up or behave like the non-Muslims do; more importantly, one should not alike himself to cultural imperialists and serve as their agents: something on the line of Sartre's image of the third world intellectuals in his introduction to Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth", with which Shariati was most fascinated. He elaborated much upon the notion of alienation using the role of Charlie Chaplin in the movie "Modern Times" (Shariati's one of favorite films) as an example of the kind of man Herbert Marcuse, Rene Gnon and Chandel have respectively referred to as "One Dimensional Man", "L'Homme Diminue'" and "L'Homme Circulaire (production for consumption and consumption for production). Individual alienation was not however what he wanted to discuss. The familiar simile of Jen Zadeqi (possession by Jinn) from his own culture would have been sufficient. From individual alienation in the highly industrial society, he made connection to "cultural alienation".

"...We are not alienated by machine or bureaucracy; a few offices and clerks do not bureaucratize one; the bourgeoisie [in our society] has not reached a stage to alienate us. Indeed what we are afflicted with, and

is more brutal and more dangerous, is
"cultural alienation".⁸²

He made a distinction between Tamaddon (civilization) and Tajaddod (modernization), elaborating upon the latter without defining the former, which is evidently something on the line of "progress", in Persian language, which a nation can supposedly obtain, possibly even from outside, without losing its native culture. Tajaddod with which the West had the mission of force feeding the underdeveloped nations in the name of Tamaddon is necessitated by Jabr -e- Mashin (determinism created by machine). Overproduction means search for new markets. But there are only potential markets that the overproducer has to develop into actual ones by first creating the need for its consumer goods; it has to change the existing tastes and create new ones. Here is where the already assimilated intellectual plays a decisive role as a go between. "In this way, all the non-European people must become Motajadded (modernized). In order for them to be modernized, their religion must be fought against because religion causes a society to feel its own identity. Religion means a supreme spirituality that everyone feels dependent upon. Once this spirituality is smashed and humiliated, it is indeed the person dependent upon this spirituality that is being smashed and humiliated. It is [for the purpose of modernization] that all of a

sudden in the East, in Asia and Africa the movement of struggle against Ta'assob (zeal) comes into existence by the indigenous [assimilated] intellectuals.⁸³

The result is obviously creation of a type of society that Aliou Diop has called "mosaic" or "terrazzic", and Shariati refers to it as Shotor-Gav-Palang (camel-cow-leopard), meaning of course a queer creature that is a combination of "camel", "cow" and "leopard" without being any of the above. Thus:

"While the non-European is happy to have become modernized, the European capitalist and bourgeois is laughing from the bottom of his heart that [the modernized] has become his consumer."⁸⁴

Mehr 20th, 1348 (October 12, 1969), he lectured at Ershad under the title "A Glance at the History of Tomorrow". The title is admittedly borrowed from the Hungarian writer, Tibor Mende, perhaps his *Reflexion sur l'histoire d'aujourd'hui, entre la peur et l'espoir*, which is translated into Persian as "A World Between Fear and Hope". The content of Shariati's lecture had, however, very little to do with this widely read work except that it was a prediction of future on the basis of the present. Using Albert Einstein, Max Plank Lecomte Du Nouy and others as "religious personalities" as well as the avant garde

thinkers of the century, he predicted that "the educated man of the future -- unlike those of the present -- will have religious thought; of course a religion 'above science', not below it".⁸⁵

Between Azar 11th to 20th, 1348 (December 2-11th 1969), at Ershad, he delivered a series of lectures about Imam Ali.

Ali is the first Imam of the Shi'ites whom, they insist, the prophet of Islam by the command of God had designated to succeed him as the leader of Muslim Ummat. Ali's God-given position was usurped by Abu-Bakr, Umar and Uthman; he was finally elected as the fourth Caliph after the assassination of Uthman. Yet, this is the historical Ali, and a Shi'ite sees Ali as much more than this. Ali, in Shi'ite lore, symbolizes a flawless personality and crystallizes all good attributes a man must -- but cannot-- have. He is the *Urbarmensche* whose qualities, ranging from physical strength to knowledge, piety, courage etc. are above those of an ordinary man. His name, which is one of the first things a child learns, is called upon at the times of difficulties. He is much admired in Shi'ite poetry and is celebrated at least three times a year: on the 13th of Rajab which marks his birthday, on the 18th of Dhul-Hajjah which is the day of his designation as the successor of Muhammad, and finally from the 19th to 21st of Ramadan, i.e. the time of his fatal injury and subsequent death two days

later. He is celebrated differently by different social groups. The masses seek Paradise through his wilayat (love), the traditional sportsmen of the zurkhaneh emphasize his chivalry and take him as a role model. The Sufi orders emphasize his esoteric knowledge and pure love for God.

Shariati of course wanted to call attention to Ali as Imam (example) whom his followers must not love blindly; in order to love him, they must first know him and that he stood for. And then mere love is not sufficient; a Shi'ite (literally meaning "follower") of Ali is the one who takes Ali as his role model in his daily life. But how could Ali and his ideals be known when there is not yet a good biography of him available? This is the question Shariati put forward, in his first lecture in this period. He repeated what he had earlier written in his introduction to the biography of "Hujr ibn Adi" by Hasan Akbari Marznak:

"If a student desires to study about Beethoven who is a German Musician -- and even in Europe not everyone likes his music -- . . . there are at least three independent, very deep beautiful . . . books as well as hundreds of articles and . . . available. This is despite the fact that our people do not need to know him and only a few like, understand and feel his work. But about

Ali, one can not find a book that one can claim as an introduction of this great man to the students, bookreaders and intellectuals"⁸⁶

This of course does not mean that in the Iranian society Ali was an unknown personality without written biographies. Quite the contrary; one could make a fairly large library of such books. What Shariat claims -- and his claim is justified to a considerable degree -- is lack of a biography of Ali which could serve as providing followers with modern revolutionary ideology while at the same time presenting a vivid account of Ali's life as its flawless praxis. This kind of biography of course did not yet exist. Nahj al-Balaghah, a collection of Ali's words collected by Muhammad ibn al-Husayn Sharif al-Radi (970-1016 a.c.) which the Shi'ites regard as Akh al-Quran (the brother of the Quran) and in a sense it is the second most important book in the Shi'ite view had remained virtually untranslated till recently when -- in Shariati's view -- two poor translations had been produced, both reflecting the world views of their translators rather than that of Ali. Shariati was interested in Ali as Ubermacht just as much as any other Shi'ite; he was however more interested in him as an Imam (example, leader) whose following could make a person Alivar (Ali-like) if not an Ali of his time.

" Ali is a leader, an Imam, and a savior. If his school of thought is the spirit of a society and its way as well as destination of life and perfection of mankind; it must be through acquaintance with his school of thought and personality rather than through mere love toward a personality whom we do not know. If love without acquaintance was any good, we would have reached great conclusions. It is impossible for a society and nation to suffer from the most torturous deprivations of backward societies if it knows and understands Ali correctly. If we see that the follower of Ali whose heart is filled with Ali's love and cries for him, his fate and that of his society is painful, it is obvious that he does not know Ali and does not understand Shi'ism even though he is apparently a Shi'ite.⁸⁷

His second lecture on Ali, dated Azar 12th, 1348, is known as Zendegi -e- Ali Pas az Margash (The Life of Ali after His Death). The title suggests its content. Ali is not dead in the true sense of word; he continues his life through a continuous historical movement known as Shi'ism.

In other words, a true Shi'ite is not merely interested in Ali as a historical personality that lived once upon a time; he is interested in him as a living ideological myth. This is the general message of the lecture.

It is obvious that Shariati in this lecture did not speak very much of Ali; he rather put forward the seeds of one of his most controversial themes, "Alavide Shi'ism vs. Safavide Shi'ism" (see below). The European and Sunni scholars charge, he noted, that "Shi'ism is a religion that Iranians made in the name of Islam in order to preserve their national and ethnic traditions and devastate Islam under this disguise" ⁸⁸. He admitted that given the popular version of Shi'ism, this claim can be proven.

"Therefore, it is an urgent need that we show Shi'ism to be free from ethnic traditions racial elements and our previous religions. These two factors, hand in hand, have made a stagnating and static Shi'ism with no resemblance to the original Shi'ism."⁸⁹

Among the intelligentsia, he recognizes two groups: Motaqaddem (those who tend to worship the old) and Motajadded (those with tendency toward modernism). The first group defends an unacceptable religion composed of "inherited dogma mixed with diverse religions such as

Judaism and Zoroastrianism as well as Greek philosophy and even Babylonian superstitions . . ."⁹⁰ The Motajadded refuses to be persuaded by the argument of their former and charges the Motaqaddem with lack of science. The whole argument is wrong; both groups fail to see the real issue. The fact is, he argues, that the educated young generation is more than ever thirsty for Islam provided that it is not presented with methods suitable for elementary schools.

Azar 11, 1348, he lectured on Imam Ali again; his title: Ali Tanha Ast (Ali Is Alone). This lecture has been understood on three levels: First, it refers to the loneliness of Ali who, as the best example of a man produced by Islam, lived a life along those who did not understand and appreciate him. This loneliness, which began with the Muhammad's death and ended with Ali's death, had two parts: 25 years of silence for the sake of preserving the unity of the young Muslim ummat, and four years of formal leadership and struggle in order to reform the ummat and to get rid of the evils introduced by the unjust leadership of his three predecessors. In this long lonely period, in order to comfort himself, Ali frequently leaves the society in the middle of the night and pours his heart out into a water well.

"Ali is alone" also means "Ali Shariati is alone", for, Shariati often identified himself with his heroes. Like

Imam Ali, Shariati is neither understood nor appreciated by men of his generation.

On the third level, Ali remains alone after his death because he remains virtually unknown to those who blindly love him. To bring Ali out of this loneliness, the loneliness which has deprived the followers of Ali of knowing all what Ali stood for in his life, Shariati takes the responsibility of reintroducing him: Azar 12th 1348, "The Life of Ali After His Death", and, Azar 20th 1348, Ali the Total Man.

Azar 19th 1348 (December 10, 1969): Methodology of Science in "Madrshah Ali Bazargani" of Tehran, which was followed by another lecture, Economic Roots of Renaissance in the same college.⁹¹ Neither of them is considerable enough to deserve our attention.

Three days later he was back in Mashad where on Azar 23rd 1348, on the occasion of founding a "book society", he delivered a lecture entitled Sokhani dar Bareh -e- Ketab (A Word About Book). As it shall be seen, he spoke only a few words on the predicted subject. At the beginning, Surah 96 of the Quran, generally believed to be the first revelation to Muhammad, and in which there is reference to creation of man, reading, divine inculcation and pen, was recited. It is considered miraculous that Islam, a religion originated in an oral culture, its founder believed to be unlettered,

speaks of reading and pen in its beginning.

Following the recitation, the written message of the popular poet and writer, Parviz Khorsand, was read: "In this strong, black and impenetrable castle which we are afflicted with, the book is a window opened to the plateau". There was virtually nothing more to be said. Shariati ended his short discussion on books by noting that "we are particularly living in the age of translation" [rather than independent research].⁹² This was of course a warning of some sort: One should not take what the Western scholars have written, and reaches the educated youth of the third world -- who are in search of ideology -- via translation, as unquestionable facts. His main point of reference was socialist and communist literature. Soon, he was speaking of "scientism" and how at the turn of the century it replaced the temple of "religion", but after the rise of Fascism it lost its appeal and a crisis period which still goes on followed.

"Today, if we consider a common school of thought or religion for the intellectuals and thinking young generation in the modern civilization . . . ,it is a kind of Protestantism, i.e. absolute Protestantism"⁹³.

By this Protestantism, evidently, he meant a category

of thought in which both Brecht's curse on scientism, Camus's rebellious protest against the status quo and Chandel's formulation of man's alienation in modern society, and much more can be put. The root of the illness against which this new Protestantism has rebelled, in Shariati's view, must be sought in the age of ideology when the "ideological architects" thought of building a more suitable habitat for humanity without having properly known man. The habitats different kinds of them -- were built. Liberal democracy created the "disaster of capitalism and machinism". Out of nationalism, there came Fascism; socialism gave way to Stalinism; and "instead of real democratic regimes, the dictatorship of technocrats which are Caesar in respect to their people and Christ in respect to their enemies . . ." ⁹⁴ all these, because of neglecting to consider man's historical self in social theorization.

For the rest of lecture, Shariati concentrated on cultural alienation as a well "designed program of cultural imperialism" after defining "historical self" on the basis of Sartre's existential humanism. The program, he suggested, has differed in respect primitive and historical societies. In the first case, the cultural imperialists could easily deny the existence of native cultures; the way was already paved. In the latter case, a two phase program had to be implemented: metamorphosing the native historical

culture and feeding it back to the native in order to make him sick of his historical self; and then alienate him with their supposedly superior culture.

"Emptying the oriental man from his self. . . How can [the West] do this? The West, by introducing us to us improperly and showing itself to us as good, . . . introduces itself as . . . flawless, belonging to a superior race, the possessor of all human virtues and all the facilities at the disposal of the superior race whose attributes, thought, works and possessions are the best, . . . who does not suffer from anything. The opinion of the Western scholar is not questionable! All the efforts must be made to understand and accept his opinion! He is the criterion! He is the sum of all human values! His civilization is what it must be! [Only] his culture has the right to live; whatever is not in accord with his culture is superstition! Every civilization and religion different from his are superstitions and must be thrown away!"⁹⁵

On Dey 7th 1348 (December 31, 1969) he was back in Tehran where and when he spoke on Ensan va Tarikh (Man and

History) in the amphitheater of the technical college of the University of Tehran. His point of departure in this long lecture was distinction between "historiography" and "science of history" and he, following Chandel, defined history as "the science of becoming of man". He repeated his formulation of man's "historical self" in the previous lecture: "every individual is the history of his society". And again Sartre's existentialism; this time from Hegel's mouth. He admitted however that Hegel's idealism had no resemblance to existentialism⁹⁶. Instead of quoting Hegel, he could have quoted Rumi to the same end⁹⁷. He made a transition to Marx's philosophy of history, emphasizing his historical determinism. By then it had become too late and he wanted to excuse himself and end there. He was, however, encouraged by the audience to continue. He did; but on the history of scientism and causes of its development. The main theme, attack on Darwinism as the scientistic foundation of human sciences. He mentioned in passing how Spencer took the notion of biological evolution as a model for sociology. Brontier wrote history of literature on the same model. David Hume wrote the natural history of religion. Daubenton, Sommering and Blumenbach founded anthropology on biological principles. These attempts, he asserted, were due the pride of young scientism. All had one thing in common; they suggested man's lack of free will. Thanks to

them, man lost his faith in himself and considered himself a helpless thing.

It is the season of Hajj pilgrimage and therefore:

"Today, Monday, Bahman 13th, [1348]
(February 2, 1969), after one week of useless effort and visiting even more useless faces of the graded personalities, I got the passport and reserved seat for Wednesday. They said that we should be present at the airport at four o'clock because there is possibility of flight at eight! . . . Although from now till departure there are many heavenly and earthly possibilities, apparently, I am on my way for the trip; and according to religion, I must write a will".

What can be the will of a teacher who, from age of eighteen till now when he is at the age of thirty five, has no savings except suffering? With all generosity and without stint, I present all my personal debts (bank and friends) to my wife. She may pay them with my salary (if it is not cut after my [possible] death), her salary and by selling my books and writings and all what I have and do not have. Since she knows all about them,

attaching a list is not necessary.⁹⁸

Like a person on his deathbed (Hajj pilgrims are supposed to be like that, because they are going to the "house of God"), he goes on to express his wish in regards to the future of his children. His first hope is his only son, Ehsan; his two daughters come second. Why do they come second?

"Not because they are female and I am old fashioned. Rather, it is because, under current conditions of our society, girls have very little chance to become someone important. They have two choices, both bad: either to stay at home, croak like a crow and live a stupid life -- which is the meaning of being religious and noble woman' -- or to become a consumer-doll of foreign goods . . . What difference does it make when she cannot be a human being . . . What is the difference between being an Oriental toilet or an Occidental toilet? Only a miracle can save an orphan girl from falling into one of these two choices.

I would like Ehsan to grow up a spiritual, humble, proud and independent thinker, rather than becoming a beer-drinking

party animal, a wishy-washy Marxist, nihilist, existentialist etc. . . . He must chose . . . As for myself, I am an existentialist, but . . . not that of tikrar (repetition), taqlid (imitation) or tarjamah (translation). I hate these three words which begin letter "t", just as I hate tarikh (history) and [Mr.] Taqizadeh. And I hate "advice", which I have never taken or given . . . [My Son]! Travel! Even though you must go on foot. You rot if you stay. "Migration" is a great word in the history of man and civilization. Vist Europe, but after you have visited Iran; otherwise, you will go blind and come back blind. "Africa" is the verse which follows "Europe". In Europe, do not confine yourself in the triangle of "restaurant, house and library", like the majority of Orientals. . . . The first thing you must do in Europe is to rent a room from a family who does not rent room to foreigners. You should stay in a neighborhood where there are foreign residents . . . Be with people without being with them . . . Only three things are worthy

of pursuing: reality, good and beauty . . .
 i.e. science, ethics (and religion), and art
 . . . I wish that in the path of your life
 you will meet one or two 'extraordinary
 souls'. And you, my wife! . . . By losing
 me, you will lose nothing in life . . .

Whatever I am, I am good enough to confess my
 shortcomings, and I have been good enough in
 the sight of God to have given me a wife like
 you . . . When I am no longer alive, I am
 sure, . . . you will take good care of
 children. My only feeling [toward myself] is
 expressed in this poem of Tavallali:

'Go and die, you man, like a stray dog! For,
 you have been none but the curse of God.
 Your bad omen shadow, was of failure and
 hopelessness,
 Over the head of your wife and children'.

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. . . .

After advice to his wife and children, he expresses his
 wish to establish a humble endowment to support three of the
 best students of a village to continue their education in
 the city of Sabzavar. He wishes that his students may
 collect and publish all his oral lessons and scattered
 conversations "where my best words are hidden"; and that his

lectures should be categorized according to the place of their delivery, and his writings according to subject matter.

And all what I have written in Europe should be collected and preserved until, God willing, they will be published. All my poetry should be collected with precision and burned with the exception of *Quy -e Sepid* (White Swan) and *Ghariq -e Rah* (Drowned in the Way), *Dar Kishvar* (In Homeland) and *Sham' -e Zendan* (Prison Candle) . . . If a good translator could be found, the text of my interview with "Guilleuse" should be translated into Persian. In particular, my book, *Desalienation des societes musulmanes*, my article, *Sociologie d' initiation*, which I have authored with four foreign sociologists (published by *Heutes Etudes*) [should be translated]. I do not wish my book, *L'ange Solitaire* translated; it is of the past . . . Give my dear . . . my regards and ask him not to publish what he has gathered about about me, because it hurts me a great deal. To my friends, from whom I have been isolated in recent years (it was due to own psychological

situation and backbreaking mental and nerve-related pressures), and are hurt by me, I apologize. I hope they understand I did not mean to be "isolated from them"; it was "escape to myself"; and the two are not the same.

My Kevir . . . , after adding Khilqat (Story of Creation) or Dard -e Budan (The Pain of "Being"), should be polished and published; its only preface should be the writing of Ayn al-Qudat (*); and, on the first page, this sentence from Thomas Wolf: "Writing is for forgetting, not for remembering".

Finally, contrary to always in the past, I feel happy and pleased that my life passed very well. Never did I commit injustice. Never did I commit treason. (Even though it might have been because I had no opportunity, I am glad I did not). The only sin I committed in my life is that once, under the advice of older ones, I ripped off the God of the clergy: At the age of eighteen, I was advised to give the first money I made after seven or eight months of work, plus the money

I received for writing articles (altogether 5000 tomans), to bay wa shart ("kolah shar'i" for "usury"). I, unaware of the nature of this filthy work, took the house of the client as "collateral", and "rented" it to himself for 100 tomans a month. For five or six months, I collected the "rent". Then I realized that this, contrary to the opinion of the scholars of religion and the reformers of the world, was a dirty business. I topped it. Even I refused to take my "capital". Nonetheless, the stain of that dirty deed is still on my shiny heart. Its memory makes the depth of my soul stink. Hopefully, there is Day of Judgment, when the fire of hell will do away with that stain.

My other sin, which I committed with good intention: death of a friend, which I could have stopped. Yet, I did not know the episode was going to lead to his death; indeed, I did not know what to do. I do not of course feel I am a dirty person. But, for ten years, I have been burning because of that, and it gets worse and worse everyday. If it (not doing a service, refraining from

self-sacrifice) was a sin, I have been punished, perhaps more than enough . . . I remember no other sin of mine . . . Thank God, my life was spent in reading, writing, talking, struggle for freedom of people, . . . teaching (which I begun at the age of 18) . . . And I am proud of not having uttered a word of praise for the pigs.¹⁰⁰ I never said a word for the sake of "convenience". My "pen" worked between me and my people, and it did not recognize anyone save my own "heart" and "mind". I am proud that, vis-a-vis those more powerful than myself, I have been haughty, just as I have been humble vis-a-vis those more humble than myself.

And, my last advice to the young generation, to whom I belong, particularly the enlightened, more particularly to my students: there has never been a time like today for the enlightened youth to have heavy positions so easily. Yet, in this deal, they lose what is more valuable than what they gain. And here is a word from a European (I do not know who): Man's honor is like a girl's virginity; once stained, nothing can

cleanse it.

Finally, our first mission is to discover the "greatest complex unknown", of which we know virtually nothing: "real people". Before tending toward any school of thought, we must learn a language for talking to people. Now, we are dumb. Since we [the enlightened] came to existence, we forgot their language. This alienation is the graveyard of all our wishes; it nullifies all of our efforts. My last word to those who, in the name of intellectualism, without knowing my religious tendency, refute me:

'My faith is neither false nor facile

No faith is more clear than mine!

In the world, there is one like me; and
"me", a "believer"?

If so, then, everyone is a believer!

In my heart, "faith" is an upward path which begins after reaching the roof of "economic justice" (in the scientific meaning of the term) and "human freedom" (in the nonbourgeois meaning of the term).¹⁰¹

Esfand 19th, 1348 (March 10, 1970) The Civilized and the Modernized, another version of his aforementioned

Tamaddon va Tajaddod, but this time at Ershad, and in front of a larger audience.¹⁰²

From Esfand 28th 1348 (March 19, 1970), for four days, Shariati, who had just returned from his first trip to the pilgrimage of Hajj sponsored by Ershad, was scheduled to speak on his experience as a pilgrim. He did so in a series of four lectures. (For his ideas about hajj, see the appendix).

Farvardin 13th 1349 (April 2, 1970), he spoke on the "the philosophy of prayer" and the role of prayer in revolutionary struggle. In particular, he concentrated on two texts: a) Sahifah Sajjadiyah, collected by Sayyid ibn Tawus (d.664 / 1265), which is believed by Shi'ites to be the words of their fourth Imam, Ali ibn al-Husayn (38-94 / 658-712), addressed to God; b) "La Priere" by Alexis Carrel. A few comments about each text are necessary:

Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn, otherwise known as "al-Sajjad", was forced into seclusion by political circumstances which followed the battle of Karbala (61 / 680) and the martyrdom of his father, Hussayn. Unlike his father and his grandfather, Ali, who are associated with "sword", al-Sajjad, the only male survivor of the battle of Karbala, engaged in constant act of worship. His Sahifah is a classical Shi'ite text, known among the Shi'ites as "the Psalms of the family of Muhammad".

In 1940, Alexis Carrel (1873-1944), winner of two Nobel Prizes for Science, wrote an article about "power of prayer" in "Readers Digest". In 1941, a new edition of it was published once again, apparently in America. A French translation of it was later on published in "Journal de Geneve" as well as in a weekly religious magazine in France. Dissatisfied with the published versions, Carrel decided to rewrite the whole thing in 1944, and to publish it under the title "La Priere".

In Iran, it was first translated by a close friend of Shariati, Engineer Kazem Ahmadzadeh before 1336, but the transcript, which Shariati wanted to publish with his own annotations and introduction, got lost when the police stormed the headquarters of National Resistance Movement in 1336. In 1338, shortly after his arrival in Paris, (indeed the first day of his arrival)¹⁰³, Shariati translated it again, and it was published years later in Tehran with Bazargan's "Prayer" in a small volume.

Shariati's interest in the philosophy of supplication must have begun with his reading of Maurice Maeterlinck in a very early age. Prayer of the believers, the skeptic Maeterlinck is quoted having said, is nothing short of telling God what to do: it is as though God did not know his duties, and man had to constantly remind Him! Shariati must have been glad to find a totally different view in

Alexis Carrel's "La Priere" (Prayer) in 1336.

There are two parts in this lecture: in the first part, he criticizes two opposing groups who, respectively in "deeds" and "words", think of "prayer" as a substitute for struggle: "the ordinary men of religion" and "the enlightened". Their disagreement is on the issue of "efficacy". Initially taking the side of the latter group to some extent, Shariati argues that "prayer" does not necessarily play the role of a substitute for human will and action; trust in God can (indeed should strengthen the will of the believer. At least, he argues, such is the nature of "genuine" Islamic prayers. Before a battle begins, Imam Ali prays to God: "If we happen to defeat the enemy, save us from being proud, selfish and unjust; if we are defeated, save us from humiliation and slavery". In other words, Islamic prayer is an "accompaniment" for action rather than being its "substitute".

Acutely aware of the fact that this is not the nature of all Shi'ite prayers, Shariati wages an attack on the prayer texts which are not "genuine", particularly many of those collected by Shaykh Abbas Qummi in his *Mafatih al-Jinan* ("Keys to Heaven"), a "holy" book found beside the Quran in the Shi'ite homes. He finds "genuine" Islamic prayers to have two parts: in the first part, (the larger part), the worshiper defines his relation to God. "It looks

like a text of theological philosophy". In the second part, the worshiper expresses his wish, which is not his personal wish but a wish for the whole society. "It is an ethical lesson; it gives an awareness to the worshiper as to where his shortcomings lie". In sum, Islamic prayers have the following characteristics: eloquence, music, intellectual element, and sociopolitical elements.

Shariati might have succeeded in presenting a new philosophy of supplication, but he does not answer the question why a Persian Muslim must pray in Arabic rather than Persian: it is as though God spoke one language only. Perhaps in order to fill in this gap, the second part of his lecture is his innovative prayer in Persian, which has eloquence, music, intellectual element, and sociopolitical elements.

On Ordibehesht 1349, the Ershad Institute held a "congress" for glorification of Muhammad Iqbal of Lahore (1873- 1938) in which many Iranian and foreign experts participated. Iqbal is too well known to need any serious introduction here. A few comments will be sufficient:

There is a strong cultural and sentimental tie between Iran and Iqbal. Iqbal wrote his doctoral dissertation on "The Development of Metaphysics in Persia" in the early part of the first decade of the twentieth century at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. This attractive doctoral

dissertation (first publication 1908 London) for years served as a text book of philosophy in Teharan University and was finally translated into Persian for the first time by A.H. Arianpoor in Farvardin 1347 / March 1968. About the same time, his "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" (a collection of his lectures) was translated into Persian by Ahmad Aram.

Since Iqbal wrote much of his poetry in Persian, he is known to many Iranians as a major voice in Persian classical poetry. Iqbal basically wrote two kinds of poetry: the so-called "lyric" mystical and allegorical love poems, and, more importantly, the philosophical and ideological poems on the tradition of Rumi, the author of "Mathnawi", whom Iqbal was in love with. It is in the latter category that Shariati found a pioneer of his task:

About Europe, humanity bitterly complains
 Human life was destroyed by Europe
 Europe was stabbed by her own sword
 Europe founded the tradition of atheism
 She is a wolf garbed as a lamb
 She is seeking lambs everywhere
 Human difficulties is because of her
 Humanity's hidden sadness is because of
 her
 She regards humanity as a mixture of dust

of water, with no supreme goal
Her knowledge is a drawn sword for
killing humanity
Woe to Europe and her religion!
Woe to her secular thought! . . .
Captain of Europe's colors! Wipe this
color out!
Believe in yourself! Disbelieve in Europe
! . . .
The author of Das Kapital, a descendent
of Abraham
That prophet who had no Gabriel
There is truth hidden in his fallacy
His heart is believer; his brain a
disbeliever
Europeans have forsaken the heavens
In stomach, they seek human soul . . .
The religion of this prophet, who knows the
truth not,
Is founded on equality of stomachs . . .
Capitalism as well, takes care of the body
Without offering a light for the heart
It is a like a bee, grazing in the rose
gardens
The bee leaves the leafs and steals the

nectar

The garden looks different to the
 nightingale

Though it is the same garden

-Marxism and capitalism, both are impatient
 Both are disbelievers, human deceptions This
 is an exit from life; that one a

taxation

Between these two millstones, humanity
 is being ground like glass

This one makes science, religion and art
 die

That one takes bread and soul away

Both are drowned in muddy water

Both make healthy bodies and dark hearts.

Life: a combination of burning and making it
 is sowing a seed of heart in a handful
 of dust.¹⁰⁴

Ershad had aimed to reintroduce Iqbal, not as a poet or a historian of philosophy, but as an Islamic ideologue in search of cultural Desalienation and of establishing Muslim unity. The collection of lectures and writings on him later on appeared as a book entitled "Allameh Iqbal". Iqbal, we must note, had a tremendous influence on Shariati's thought. In fact, the latter is no more than a long commentary on the

former.

Ordibehesht 4th, 1349, Shariati introduced Iqbal as Mosleh -e- Qarn -e- Akhir (the reformer of the last century). In this context, the word Mosleh (literally translated as reformer) needs an explanation; it does not mean "less than a revolutionary", but rather someone who has paved the way for revolution. In this lecture, Shariati did not speak so much of Iqbal and his thought except the latter's doctrine of "Reconstruction" and "Return to Self", the two themes which runs through Shariati's works. He proposed that a similar congress must be held as soon as possible for Al-Afghani, "the first cry of awakening in the asleep Orient, the one that still suspicious thoughts and polluted hands are afraid of his shadow and bomb his memory".¹⁰⁵ By mentioning al-Afghani's name, he wanted to avoid discussing Iqbal in isolation; to connect him with the chain of "Islamic Renaissance" initiated by al-Afghani and his disciple Muhammad Abduh. By "suspicious thoughts and polluted hands", he referred to the recent investigations about al-Afghani which pictured the latter as a member of Freemason and sympathetic to the Babi movement.

Mordad 22 & 23, 1349 (August 13-14, 1970), in a lecture entitled Religion Against Religion, after providing an innovative meaning for kufr (disbelief) and shirk (polytheism), he demonstrates how, in the entire human

history, "true religion" has been victimized and persecuted by "false religion" rather than "irreligiousness". Kufr and shirk, he argues, are religions as well. In the permanent battle between islam (any true religion) on the one hand, and Kufr and shirk on the other, as long as the two latter-manifest themselves "as such", it is so difficult, at least not impossible, for islam to achieve victory. But, when Kufr and shirk put on the cloak of islam, truth is bound to be defeated. Hence, "the victory of Muhammad over non-Muslims", and hence "the defeat of Imam Ali within the world of Islam". Shariati's main point of reference, however, is "contemporary" and "social" rather than "historical": At the present, because Islam is a cloak for hidden Kufr and shirk, it is very difficult to introduce true Islam and secure its victory.

Concentration on the nature of "any religion which justifies status quo, traditional Islam included, he boldly concludes:

. . . . That in 19th century it was that "religion is opiate of the masses, . . . that in 18th and 19th century it was said that "religion is born out of man's ignorance about scientific causes, that "religion has grown out of man's fear and panic", . . . that "religion has its roots in discrimination,

property ownership and deprivation of feudalism", . . . they are all true. But, what "religion" is that? The religion which has dominated history; it is other than the [religion] which, like a lightning, shines and dies within a short period of time".¹⁰⁶

During the month of Dey, Shariati prepared for his second trip of Hajj. During this trip, he delivered dozens of lectures in Mecca and Medina to his co-voyagers, one of them being his old father: "Medina, the city of emigration", "reflection on different kinds of emigration", "how can the young generation be saved?", "emigration, leadership and community", "analysis of the rites of hajj", "Muhammad, the reviver of the religion of Abraham", and "sacrifice" were some the subjects he discussed. Upon his return from the pilgrimage, he prepared for collecting his personal reflections on hajj, which, in a year, appeared in one of his widely read books (see appendix).

At some point in 1349 (1970) Shariati was "forced to retire" from teaching in Ferdowsi University. Different reasons are given for this forced retirement, and one can only speculate: His followers claim that SAVAK was responsible for firing him, for, he had made his classes a breeding ground for his "dangerous Islam". His secular opponents say that he was spending too much time

out of Mashad, particularly in Ershad, and was therefore unable to be on time for his class lectures. Considering the fact that the star of his fame was shining in the capital, I also speculate that he personally did no longer wish to remain in Mashad.

His personal depression of this period, particularly a sense of being betrayed by all friends, is quite visible in his Husayn, the Heir of Adam (dated Muharram of 1349/ 1970), one of the most complex and most moving pieces Shariati ever wrote in his entire life, clearly an attempt at self-consolation. Despite the complexity of the text for those who are not familiar with Shariati's rhetorical language (in fact he had to provide many footnotes in order to make it understandable for his disciples), the idea preached in this piece is quite simple:

Shariati's rhetorical language (in fact he had to provide many footnotes in order to make it understandable for his disciples), the idea preached in this piece is quite simple:

"Husayn the Heir of Adam" draws inspiration from a short Shi'ite text which addresses Imam Husayn: "Divine greetings upon you, O, Adam's heir . . . Noah's heir . . . Abraham's heir . . . , Moses' heir . . . , Jesus' heir . . . Muhammad's heir . . . Ali's heir". Shi'ites frequently recite it in many places and occasions.

In what sense Hussayn, the martyr of Karbala, is the heir of all these great personalities? Shariati tries to respond to this question by suggesting that history of mankind is nothing but a constant struggle between "right" and "might", "light" and "darkness", "the oppressed" and the oppressor", etc. In this constant struggle, there are three evil forces: "gold", "power" and "deception", which respectively symbolize "the wealthy", "the kings and rulers", and "the clergy". The elements of this "bad-omen" trinity, which is one and three at the same time, constantly line against the forces of "right" and "light", the masses of people, and victimize them. Every now and then, the victimized masses find a champion, who tries to lead them out of their misfortune and bring the "right" and the "light" unto the throne of power. Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are such champions, but their reign is very

short; before long, the trinity of evil, this time garbed as the "heir" of the "champion", comes out of its hidings and victimizes the masses.

The cycle repeats itself again and again. The fate of Islam was no different; the reign of true Islam was very short, and, before long, its heritage fell into the hands of the hidden enemies of Islam who had garbed themselves as Muhammad's "heirs".

Hussayn is the true heir of all of the champions of the meek and the oppressed, because he layed his life down in a struggle against injustice. Since there is injustice in the world (in fact more than ever before), "every month is Muharram, every day is Ashura, and every land is Karbala". Someone must rise and claim Husayn's heritage and be his true heir.

In this piece, Shariati tries to present a simple formula of "situation human" through overcoming "time" and "space" in "history" and "geography". That is what makes the text extremely interesting.¹⁰⁷

For Shariati at Ershad, Farvardin 20th 1350 (Friday April 9th 1971) is a turning point: he thanks the authorities of Ershad for having changed his schedule from "public lecturing" to "teaching", his theme "history of religions", an approximately once every fifteen days. The last lesson (#14) must have ended sometimes at the beginning

of Bahman (mid-January 1972), because, his first lesson on Islamshenasi (different from the Islamshenasi of Mashad University) begins on Friday 15th of Bahman (February 4, 1972), and ends sometimes in 1973, after twenty-seven lessons. These "classes", we are informed, were attended by more than 3000 students (Islamshenasi, preface).

If changing Shariati's schedule into "teaching" might have been intended to limit his provocative public arguments, the plan failed without his realization or protest.

Tir 14th 1350 / July 5th 1971, in Ershad, he lectured on the issue of women. Since he introduced Fatimah (Muhammad's beloved daughter, Ali's wife, and the mother of Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn and Zaynab), and since, at the end of his lecture he confessed his inability to give Fatimah a deserving title, the transcribed and edited version of the lecture was later on named Fatimah Fatimah Ast (Fatimah is Fatimah).¹⁰⁸

In this lecture, Shariati recognizes three categories of Iranian women: a) those already molded by old-fashion traditional roles of "mother" and "housewife"; those who, deprived of many things including literacy, must "produce children at home, and tears in the mourning gatherings"; b) Those already re-shaped by the waves of modernism; those who can be defined as "the animals who shop"; they are merely

consumers of foreign goods, who have abandoned the responsibilities of traditional wives; c) The educated young generation women who cannot follow the footsteps of their traditional mothers; nor do they wish to be animals who shop or the objects of commercial advertisings. The last group, Shariati argues, is in bad need of a suitable role model.

Who can be their role model? Since they are practically deprived of learning about women of great achievement in the world, since the "dirty magazines" introduce movie stars and fashion models only, the learned have the important responsibility of introducing a good role model to them, if they do not wish to see them be victims of consumerism.

For Shariati, such role model is "Fatimah", the daughter of Muhammad, whose life-story he tells in the form of a story with many moral conclusions: Fatimah is a good daughter for her father, a good wife to her husband, Ali, she is good mother for her sons and daughters, and her everyday duties do not stop her from struggle in the way of God: Unlike traditional and modern women, she is a sociopolitical being who takes her responsibilities very seriously.

Finally, Shariti argues, one cannot define Fatimah in terms of one of her many duties; "Fatimah is Fatimah".

Aban 8th 1350 / October 30th 1971, in a highly emotional lecture, Father, Mother, We Are Accused,

importantly from the mouth of the educated (and dissatisfied) young Shite generation, he wages his most serious battle against traditional Shi'ism. In no other piece of "anti-Shi'ite" literature one has ever opened the gate of disgrace so wide open on the face of a religion deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the old generation which is incapable of satisfying the religious needs of the new generation. On the issue of "intercession", for instance:

Daddy! Mommy! I am very different from you. The kind of God that you and people like you think of and make, takes the place of your responsibility, your will, and all your duties in this world and in the hereafter! With flattery, offerings and prayers, you think you are exempt from the punishment for the crimes you commit. Just as when a new tax law is passed [and you do not wish to pay tax] . . . , you use your available connections, call this guy on the phone, bribe and pay off that guy, . . . , just as you do all these in your social life, you do the same in regards to your God
Daddy! Mommy! This is the religious path you show me. I do not wish to be imprisoned,

wretched and captive in this world. I want to be free, honorable and proud. I prefer the kufr (which gives me freedom, fortune and prosperity in this world) to your religion (which causes and approves of captivity, pain and poverty) . . . Now you are free to cuss, criticize and curse me!¹⁰⁹

Little wonder then that Ershad in general, and Shariati in particular, comes under verbal attack from traditional clergy. Someone might have suggested to him at Ershad that he had gone too far: that one had to wait for the Mahdi, the messiah of Islam, to come and revive the true Islam in the real sense. On 8th of Aban 1350 (October 30, 1971), in a lecture entitled *Intizar: Madh-hab -e I'tirad* (Anticipation: Religion of Protest), he pointed out that "waiting for the Mahdi" does not have to be a "passive" anticipation; it can (and should be) a "positive protest" against status quo. A week later, on 15th of Aban 1350 (November 6th 1971), he followed the same argument in another lecture, *Mas'uliyat -e Shi'ah Budan* (The Responsibility of Being Shi'ite), arguing that one should not stand still, waiting for the savior. One should rather pave the way for the inevitable emergence of justice.

Meanwhile, clerical agitation against Shariati was reaching one of its heights, when he was preparing a more

serious battle:

If in Father, Mother, We are Accused he had refuted the use of traditional Shi'ism, now it was time to put forward his alternative progressive Alavid Shi'ism forward and compare it with the decadent and reactionary Safavid Shi'ism. In this "comparative" lecture, Alavid Shi'ism vs. Safavid Shi'ism, delivered sometime in Aban 1350, he extended his criticism of traditional Shi'ism to its "leaders", the mullas, as well. There, not only the two versions of one religion, Shi'ism, are compared in details, the clergy, particularly those in charge of pamphleteering against Ershad are mercilessly disgraced. He demonstrates how traditional religious authorities play with the laws of the Quran, and change it to serve personal interests. For instance:

Don't you see? In the Quran, usury is declared as "waging war against God". But, [the clergy] has managed to round the law so simply and beautifully! Even the most intolerent inspector of religious law can call it "usury" or even find the slightest legal problem with it. How is that? First of all, [they argue], what is being dealt with is, not [real] money (gold and silver), but banknotes. It is "usury" when real money

is involved. Secondly, money interest is money interest when it is called as such: suppose I lend you 100,000 tomans in order to receive 120,000 tomans, it is usury. But, "doing business" is not forbidden in Islam; it pleases God. "Those who work are friends of God", [so says the hadith]. OK, I tell you what to do: you go to "Reverend X", and he will instruct you how to safely transform "usury" into "business". How? Very simple! Even a jinn cannot think of it! Instead of calling it "usury", call it "deal" in your heart: it is "intention" which counts. How? Give the 100,000 toman as "interest-free" lending, but, with that, you sell him a handful of salt for 20,000 tomans. Do you see how it works? Now, imagine that it is the day of judgment and you are being tried for alleged usury. What case can be brought against you? Is "business" forbidden? Is it forbidden to sell any good for any price if the buyer is happy to buy it? [God] has no choice but to dismiss the case! . . . Yes, the clergyman of the Safavid Shi'ism can shut God up with a handful of salt!

[Another example]: Suppose you work for the government. Because the government is not Islamic and just, your salary is impure. What should you do? Quit your job? Not necessarily. You take your salary to a "Reverend X", and he will launder it for you! How? Here is the formula: You "return" all the money to "Reverend X", who is the "real authority". The money is his. Then, because you are a needy Muslim with wife and children, he will donate an amount of money, close to the amount you have given him, to you, from public treasury. Thanks to this simple mechanism, you are automatically transformed from "an agent of aggression" to "one who receives his salary from the Imam"! This is an art of "alchemy" that the clergy of Safavid Shi'ism performs.¹¹⁰

Aban 18th 1350 / November 9th 1971 / Ramadhan 20th 1391: Yes, So It Has Been Brother in Ershad (see my translation of the piece). In this lecture, delivered for the occasion of Imam Ali's death, Shariati mocks Shah's celebration of "2500 years of Monarchy" in allegorical language. In this lecture, he speaks of the memories of his trip to Egypt (summer of 1350 / 1971) and his visit to the

pyramids. Discovering the usually "overshadowed" graves of the slaves who had actually built the Pyramids for the pharaohs, he returns to his hotel, disturbed. He picks up paper and pen, and writes a "letter" to one of these slaves, "his brother", telling him "about all what happened after his death": generation after generation, the slaves continued to build palaces for kings and to go to war for kings, and hoped that one day their destiny would change. Nothing serious was accomplished by so many sages, philosophers and prophets who claimed to have brought the glad tidings of salvation. Finally, Muhammad came and, alas, his message was distorted by his self-proclaimed heirs and successors, who in fact victimized Muhammad's family more they victimized the slaves. Nonetheless, his religion produced the exemplary Ali, who, like Muhammad, sided with the oppressed. Shariati invites the hypothetical recipient of the letter (in fact the present audience) to follow the way of Ali.¹¹¹

Azar 1st 1350 / November 22nd 1971, Shariati lectures, not at Ershad, but in Aryamehmehr University; the title of his talk: From Where Shall We begin?, a lecture which is widely read by English-speaking readers.¹¹²

Azar 23, 1350 / December 14, 1971, a round table discussion is held at Ershad, Shariati being the main target of questioning and criticism. The day coincides with

commemoration of the "death of Imam al-Sadiq". Sadr Balaghi is chairman, Ali Amirpour is secretary, and the participants are Shariati and his father, Haj Sayyid Murtada Shabistary, and Minachi (director of Ers@ad). The public had already been invited to bring its questions and criticism for answer. By way of opening, Balaghi gives the gladtidings of the Quran to "those who listen the word and follow its best". Then, "Oh God! Show us things as they really are", he recites the prayer. Then the secretary comments on the lengthy and repetitive nature of the questions and criticism received. He summarizes them:

1 - For writing his Islamshenasi (of Mashad), Shariati has used "Sunni" sources. Why not "Shi'ite " sources? Accusation follows the question: it is widespread that Ershad has Sunni tendencies, and it propagates "Wahhabism". Is it true? Shariati's father provides the prelude to direct answer: Ershad is like the old train that once upon a time ran between the old city of Ray and Tehran. As long as it was in the station, no one bothered to do anything with it; once it took off, every child standing by threw a stone at it. Yes, in our society, which is opposed to any "movement", as soon as something starts moving, people throw a stone at it, or try to spit on it. These false accusations are nothing but spits.

Because many of the letters of criticism received

contains curses and insults, the old Shariati refers to Nahj al-Balaghah, where Imam Ali says he does not like his followers to curse and cuss. Then, the list of the past programs of Ershad is presented as proof of Ershad's particular adherence and attention to Shi'ite dogma. Then Ali Shariati cites his reasons for having based his book on "the oldest" sources: first of all, in historiography, one must use the oldest possible sources as base. Secondly, use of Sunni sources by Shi'ite scholars is nothing new. In fact, Shi'ites must be proud to know that the authenticity of their beliefs can be proven on the basis of Sunni sources as well. Third, using Sunni sources by Shi'ite scholars might encourage "our Sunni brothers" to use Shi'ite sources in reciprocation. Fourth, there is nothing contrary to Shi'ism in Islamshenasi; all misunderstandings have resulted from "misreading"; if the critics had read the book carefully, they would have understood something else. For instance, there, it is indicated how, by accepting Islam, Abu-Bakr brought his "fellow-conspirators", into the young Islamic ummah. There as well, it is shown why Ali was the fittest to succeed Muhammad. Finally, it is so obvious that all these criticism come from one source: if not, why they are all the same and in reference to a specific page? Why all have misread the author's "criticism of democracy" (modern Sunni apologists' idea about Muhammad's successors)

as the author's alleged notion that "Divine right of Ali should be over-ruled by democracy", and that because it is "undemocratic", it must therefore be wrong"? The heart of the issue is whether democracy, which has many legitimacy problems even in the modern world, could be justified in early Islam.

Sadr Balaghi, already knowing that Shariati's lengthy (but necessary) comments is not going to change the mind of critics, tells the story of a man from Isfahan who was illegally carrying a load of "gun-powder": Arrested by the police, he says "it is not gun-powder, but "nigella seeds" that he is taking to a bakery. He is finally taken judge. The man insists on his claim: they are nigella seeds for decorating bread. In the state of frustration, the judge makes the man hold some of his "nigella seeds" under his beards, strikes the match, and the man's beard catches fire. "Is it gun-powder now?", the judge asks. "No", the man says, "they are nigella seeds, just as I have said all along"!

Not Shariati alone, but the whole Ershad is the target: "Why chairs and decorations in this Husaynieh? Compare the mosque of the Prophet with the mosque Mu'awiyah built in Syria! Obviously, you have put chairs here so that the pants of your audience does not get wrinkled! Woe to a Muslim whose pants are more dear to him than his religion! .

. . . And, look at this guy with long hair who is taking photos! He is the symbol of what you stand for!"

Sadr Balaghi: "Thank God, we have this long-haired fellow to answer all the issues!"

Shariati: "This question must be answered by the audience"! Amirpour: "That's what he says: 'this question must be answered by the audience whose pants may get wrinkled'!"

Following this, Ershad comes under question for having held "the week of Muhammad Iqbal", (on Ordibehesht 1349 / May 1970), "who is a sunni and an enemy of the Shi'ite Imams". This is when Shariati brings the house down by reading the poems of Iqbal in praise of Fatimah, Ali, Hasan and Husayn, and by exposing how the critic has misread a certain "Jafar" (from Bengal) and "Sadeq" (from Dakan), both "agents of British colonialism", as "Ja'far al-Sadiq", the sixth Shi'ite Imam!

The "round table discussion" is extended for another day. Repetition. Someone from the audience (he sounds like Dr. Paknejad of Yazd) is eager to speak; his main problem are as follows: a) Ali, and not Abu-Bakr, is the first person to accept Islam. (It is not clear why he brings this issue up); b) Shariati is wrong in saying in his Islamshenasi that Prophet Muhammad let Abu-Bakr lead the prayer when the Prophet was on his death bed. Hadith has it

that the Prophet entered the mosque and told Abu-Bakr that "this position is exclusive to me and my successor"; c) There is but one Shi'ism, Alavid Shi'ism; there is not such a thing as Safavid Shi'ism is that the women who come to Ershad have "no adequate cover", they mix with men, they participate in direct question and answer with the opposite sex.

The man is let to finish his lecture. Shariati agrees with him on the first issue. Not only that, Ali is the only among the first believers who spent all his adult life (practically from age 12) in Islam; his mind has never been polluted with polytheism. He is "infallible" in the true sense of word; and "I" have pointed out all these (and much more) in several places.

On the second issue, Shariati argues, there are various and contradicting accounts. Granted that I have given Abu-Bakr a credit he does not deserve; leading one prayer does not made one a community leader. In fact, it is no credit for Abu-Bakr at all: according to Sunni jurisprudence, any ordinary man, who knows how to recite his prayer correctly, can lead public prayer. The Shi'ite reports have it that he did not lead the prayer with the approval of the Prophet. So, case closed!

On the issue of Safavid Shi'ism, "it is obvious that the gentleman has merely heard about it rather than having

listened to the lecture in which I contrasted it with Alavid Shi'ism: Safavid Shi'ism. I argued, is an Iranian invention rather than a true religion. It is opposed to true Shi'ism . . . If there was time, I could argue that there are more than two Shi'isms. There is 'Sufyani' Shi'ism as well: Abu-Sufyan, a sworn enemy of Prophet Muhammad (before he was forced by circumstances to accept Islam and escape death) is one of the first to support Ali's cause after Muhammad's death".

Finally, Shariati blasts the man off by commenting on the issue of women:

We must change our current attitude toward women. Friends! Believing friends! Today, women are no longer those creatures whose mind, in the opinion of the religious, is less than that of men and therefore should be deprived of educational, social and human rights and sit at home merely as convenient means of reproduction. Yes, because man and woman have different functions (and they have many common duties too), each is created in accordance to his/her duties. Therefore, we observe that "reason" is stronger in men and "feeling" is stronger in women. Today, in this society, this is a fact. Boys and girls

are studying together. Whether you like it or not, both sexes are thinking on the same level. I taught in a girl high school, and I taught in university too. In both periods, I had male and female students. I never felt that the female to be mentally less than the male. Never! I know better than you do, because I have had experience and you have not. It is you who did not let the female to grow. Therefore, she is weak. It is you, [not her nature], who has given her the title d'ifah (weak female)". If you had given the female an opportunity for education and participation, . . . , she would not be today deprived of coming here and asking her questions You never made a library or a university for the female in order to be able to justify [separation of sexes]. She is even deprived of serious participation in religious gatherings You did permit her to come out in order to know. Today, she is trying to obtain all what you were supposed to give her and you did not Now, you -- the religious -- argue that she should cover herself from head to toe, sit

behind the curtain, and do not ask questions . . . What is she supposed to think of you and religion? Do you expect her not to go to the places where she is not humiliated? [You can no longer keep her from knowing; if she is not permitted to listen], she can still read about it. She is reading everything. Do you really believe that Islam regards the male superior to the female? . . .

Finally, granted I am guilty of all what you say, how much am I going to be fined? And, why should Wrrshad be put on trial for the crimes I have committed?¹¹³

On Muharram 9th 1392 (March 1972 / Esfand 1350), he delivered one of his classic lectures, Shahadat (martyrdom, testimony) in Ershad, which was followed by another, After Shahadat, on the following night in Masjid -e Jami' Narmak.

On those days, the two lectures, particularly the latter, were interpreted on three levels: First, the occasion was tasu'a and ashura, which mark the martyrdom of Imam Husayn in (61 / 680); they are the days of public mournin9 in all Shi'ite communities, Iran in particular. By refering to ashura as "feast of blood", Shariati made two major points: ashura must be a day of joy, at least of

pride, for the Shi'ites. One must perhaps cry for the dead, but Husayn is not dead to need our tears. He is a living shahid (martyr, witness, the one who sees) and, according to the Quran, those killed in the way of God are eternally alive(*). Husayn is an imam, and we are his shi'ites (followers); in similar circumstances, we must act as he did: if we cannot kill the enemy, we must disgrace him through our own death.

It is already obvious what the second level of interpretation of his lecture is: ashura is the day on which Husayn calls upon all his followers, no matter where and in which generation, to rise and bear "witness" with their blood: "Is there anyone to help me?", history records that Husayn said this where and when he knew there was no one to help him. This must therefore be an eternal message to all generations. In other words, in these two lectures, in allegorical language (but not so difficult to interpret), Shariati asks his audience to revolt against the Shah, the oppressor Yazid of his own time.

Finally, the tasu'a and ashura of that year is connected with some contemporary martyrs: A month before (Bahman 1351), ten members of the People's Mujahedin, two of them pupils of Shariati (*), are killed by the Shah's police. Therefore:

Sisters and brothers! The martyrs are

now dead, and we -- the dead -- are still alive. The martyrs have conveyed their message and we -- the deaf -- are their audience. Those who were bold enough to choose death, when they could no longer live, have left; we -- the shameless -- have remained. We have remained for hundreds of years. It is quite appropriate for the whole world to laugh at us, because we, the symbols of abjection and humility, are weeping for Husayn and Zaynab, the manifestations of life and honor. This is another injustice of history: the we -- the despicable -- should be mourners of those mighty ones. Today the martyrs delivered their message with their blood and sat opposite us in order to invite the seated ones of history to rise" . . . Those who died committed a Husayn-like act. Those who survive must perform a Zaynab-like act. Otherwise, they are the followers of Yazid".¹¹⁵

In order to appreciate the power of these words, one must put himself in the shoes of the believing audience listening to a piercing voice from the throat of a Shi'ite speaker of exceptional gift and talent, burning in the fever

of ashura; a state wherein there is no room for ordinary reason and logic.

Considering the examples of Yes, So It Has Been Brother!, Shahadat and After Shahadat, it should be obvious that the majority, if not all, of Shariati's lectures and writings must be put in their proper context in order to be appreciated. Unfortunately, the editors of his "Collected Works" have often failed to be of meaningful help in this regard. One can, nonetheless, make a general statement about the essence of his Islam.

Farvardin 11-14, he delivered one of his most famous lecture series, Ummat va Imamat, an issue which had once upon a time presented in Mashad University, years earlier. He drew attention to the philological affinity between the two concepts, Ummat (community) and Imamat (leadership), almost impossible to translate, and the dynamism which they embody. He suggested that the original aim of the prophet of Islam was the establishment of a dynamic society, an Ummat, under the leadership of the Imam. As the leaders of temporary revolutionary government (similar to the contemporary guided democracy), the Imams have the responsibility of preparing the Ummat for the government of the councils, that of the people by the people. Due to some circumstances, however, what Muhammad had wished failed to take place. Nevertheless the model could be used for the

establishment of the an Islamic government in the contemporary society.

This highly innovative concept of "imamate" contributed a great deal in theorization of the model on which finally the Islamic Republic of Khumayni was based after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Indeed, almost all who agreed with the contents of Ummat va Imamat pictured Khumayni as the only one who could possibly play the role of "the Imam" that Shariati had described.

The month of Tir of this year coincided with Ayyam -e Fatimiyah, the days which mark the exactly unknown date of the death of Fatimah. Obviously, the issue of "women" should be the topic of Ershad. Tir 4th 1351 (June 25, 1972), Sayyed Ali Khamanehi, presently the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran was scheduled to speak on the issue of women at Ershad; he was unable to come. As usual ready to speak, Shariati took his place. "What does the present age expects from Muslim Woman?", his lecture came to be known. Nothing beyond what he had spoken of on the same issue two years before. Tir 22-24 (July 13-14, 1972), a seminar was held on the issue of women in which he played the role of moderator.

In 1972, a couple of his students had written a play on Abudhar which had soon come on the stage at the university theater. For a while, Shariati was thinking about bringing

it on the stage at Ershad. Much difficulty was on the way. Ershad was a sacred place or at least not profane enough for theatre. This could be solved because historically the traditional Husayniyehs had frequently been the stage for passion plays albeit of a different kind. The big problem was that music, a forbidden art by the orthodox Islamic jurisprudence, played an important function in Abudhar. Shariat insisted that he could not do without music; but finally he agreed to compromise. By the beginning of Mordad 1351 (August 1972), the play was ready to go on the stage. A short while before the curtain, rumour spread that a bomb has been installed under the stage. In order to embolden the trembling audience, Shariati rushed to the stage and spoke longer than expected. The play was a success and according to one account 40,000 people saw it.

By the middle of the month of Mehr, the students of Ershad were prepared to bring another play, Sarbedariyeh on the stage and preparations were on their way for a third on the basis of his "Husayn, The Heir of Adam". A historical play, Sarbedariyeh told the story of Shaykh Khalifah and his followers, known as Sarbedaran (literally meaning "the hanged ones"), who revolted against the Mongolian ruler of Iran in order to establish a pure Shi'ite government in Sabzavar. Disillusioned by superstitions: of jurisprudence and its experts who willy-nilly justify the status quo,

Shaykh presents Islam in socio-political contexts, turning it into ideology for action. The first accusation comes from the clergy charging: "he speaks of worldly affairs in the house of God". They also write to the king demanding the death of this "Rafidi" who does not follow the straight path. One morning, however, Shaykh is found dead in the mosque, but his student "Hasan Jawri" continues the struggle from the villace of Bashtin, the inhabitants of which are host to unwanted royal guests. The people of the village who are certain that they can not defeat a big army, decide to choose their own death and fight to the last breath. They triumph and establish their government over the entire Khurasan.

SHI'ISM: AN UNDERGROUND POLITICAL PARTY?

Beginning on Aban 2nd 1351, in three highly offensive and defensive lectures, Shariati pronounced Shi'ism as a "total party". It was late at night and he, at the beginning of his lecture, made metaphoric use of "the heart of the night" -- a clear reference to his intellectual environment -- and explained why he "cannot sit in a corner and do scholarly work" -- perhaps an apology for his "Return to Self". Once again, he brought his traditional opponents -- the advocates of "Safavide Shi'ism" -- under the fire of harsh words: " . . . the more the adversaries become strong in their opposition, the more the groups and wings show

susceptibility, the 'way to go' becomes more clear, the truth becomes more recognized, and of course the responsibility becomes heavier and heavier on our shoulders". He tried to show how the tenets of progressive Shi'ism had gradually turned into useless and reactionary elements.

In formulizing his "Shi'ite party", he reinterpreted several Shi'ite ideas in the light of modern underground organizations: Shahadat is not getting oneself killed in vain; it is "readiness to die for an ideal". Taqlid is not "imitation of a grand jurist" in minute details of religious rites; it is "unquestionable obedience to the command of the leader". Taqiyah (mental reservation) is not "when in Rome, do as Romans do"; it is "secrecy", a necessity of covert jiha struggle) when overt struggle is not a feasible tactic and strategy. In this way, Shariati goes on to instruct the possibility and necessity of establishing hizballah, the "party of God".¹¹⁶

Aban 5th 1351 (November 27, 1972), coinciding with 19th of Ramadhan (assassination of Ali), in Ershad, Shariatia delivered lecture under the title "The Message of Hope For the Responsible Enlightened". Unlike in his other lectures, he followed the passages of a "Surah" of the Quran, Surat al-Rum, which deals with the inevitable mutual defeat of the Persians and the Romans at the hand of each other and hence,

Muhammad's glad tidings to his followers that Islam shall eventually triumph over both:

The Roman Empire has been defeated
-- in a land close by; but they (even) after
(this) defeat of theirs, will soon be
victorious -- within a few years. With God
is the decision, in the past and in the
future: on that day shall the believers
rejoice with the help of God. He helps whom
He will, and He is Exalted in Might Most
Merciful. (It is) the promise of God. Never
does God depart from His promise: but most
men understand not. They know but the outer
(things) in the life of this world: but of
the end of things they are heedless".

In these verses, all exegetes agree, there is a prediction, which happened to be right: "within a few years", Romans defeated the Persians. Unlike historians who are informed of the constantly changing balance of power between the two "super powers" of those days, Muslims tend to see a miracle in this correct prediction. Why, "on that day", do "the believers rejoice"? Evidently because, in the process of frequent victory and defeat, the two great powers weaken and demolish each other to the extent that a new group, the Muslims, armed with a new incentive, will be bold

enough to do away with the rabbles of both.

Now, Shariati argues, this kind of classic interpretation can be merely of historical interest: the promise of God was carried out shortly after the prediction. Is there anything in it for contemporary Muslims? Indeed there is, if one goes beyond short-sighted interpretations. Indeed the message of the verses is addressed to all similar circumstances. At the present, for instance, there are two super powers; both ideologically bankrupt. Yet, the majority follow either this or that. The "responsible enlightened" of the Islamic countries, however, follow that path of Islam which is neither Eastern nor Western. In the face of the ideological bankruptcy of the East and the West, triumph belongs to this small group which, despite its apparent weaknesses, is armed with a strong ideology.¹¹⁷

Aban 7th 1351 / 21st of Ramadan 1392 / October 29, 1972, the day which coincided with commemoration of the death of Ali, gave Shariati an opportunity to wage a well-calculated attack upon his foes and critics among the clergy. In a lecture entitled Qasetin, Mareqin, Nakesin, he categorized the enemies of any movement in general and of Islam in particular into three: Qasetin or the external enemies, Mareqin or stupid zealots who have faith but not intelligence, and finally Nakesin, the willful traitors who have disguised themselves as true believers to explode the

movement from within. He commented that Islam in its battle against the external enemies proved victorious; but remained defenseless vis-a-vis the internal ones. It was the last two categories which brought Ali unto his knees fourteen centuries ago. Drawing a parallel between Ali's tragic situation and his, Shariati boldly attacked all those who under the banner of safeguarding religion had spoken or written against him. He had been advised to "speak of your ideas; never mind the wrong ideas of others" to which he responded "I do not understand. How can one speak of purification without discussing ritual pollutions?"

. . . even once, it is not heard that they, even by mistake, should have said that "under the right eyebrow of Moshe Dayan there is no eye" (i.e. they never criticize Israel), but, all of a sudden, within a year, hundreds of declarations, lectures, treaties and books are produced against a writer or a speaker, . . . who has no power to defend his case . . . In the name of religion and as defence of Islam . . . and the ruhaniyat, they utter the worst possible insults, calling it "Islamic", "scientific" and "logical" criticism."

In every generation, there are false

accusations, repressions, agitations and noises on all fronts, no matter how diverse and contradicting, against an awakened and awakening person or an institute. In this theatrical battle, people are made to imagine a danger, harm or deviation, posed by the person or institute against their religion. They therefore tend to think of that person or institute as the only source of their misfortunes. Yet, after ten or fifteen years of battling against the movement, they realize that "he", just like each one of them, was afflicted with the same suffering, and had the same fate and faith. That day, however, is too late. Everyone realizes that the hand of conspirators had made the theatrical battle in order to keep them from thinking about the real issues.

[If such is not the case], why then, exactly at the time when . . . Palestine is usurped, we must all begin to fight each other . . . !? What is the real issue.¹¹⁸

Shariati's final decision to reside in Tehran comes at the end of 1351 (1972), an occasion which triggers his Farewell, City of Martyrdom, addressed to his hometown,

Mashad.

In this poem-like moving piece, Shariati romantically reviews the history of the holy city, beginning the shrine in which a martyr (Imam Rida) and an executioner (caliph Harun al-Rashid) are buried side by side: "Here is a lesson!" with its departments, endowments, decorations etc., the building keeps the memory of many men of power and wealth alive: even the most powerful, such as Tamerlane, Mahmud of Ghazna and Nadershah, have sought refuge here from the harm of this world. Shah Abbas the Great has come here, barefoot from Isfahan, for seeking a shelter. Here, Naser al-Din Shah was no more than a simple servant in charge of lighting the candles. Here is the heart of a city which was founded near the debris of the old city of Tus.

In the shrine, Shariati identifies himself with the "female deer" which, according to popular Shi'ite belief, once upon a time Imam Rida freed from the hands of a hunter and let her go nurse her babies. Out of the shrine, Shariati identifies himself with the Iranian epic poet, Firdowsi, and laments the destruction of Iran at the hand of "savage Arabs":

What do I know?
 But I know this much that
 As soon as this young tree,
 The tree which is from the same family

as the tough trees of the desert

Began to grow leaves and fruits in this
garden,

There came the winter

And the merchants of lumber, the
charcoal sellers, and the bakers

Plunked it out.

And, the frightened deer, alas!

They pulled her out of her sacred
shelter

And gave her back to the hunter

And, this village boy of Khurasan,

[Firdowsi] . . .

At the time when the "savage Arabs" have
attacked us, this time from the "West",

And are looting our culture and
history . . . in the name of "civilization"

And the castles and citadels have
already fallen . . .

And the firetemples are off and cold,

At the time when . . . religion has
become a toy in the hands of the powerful

. . . 119

Shariati goes on, not only to say under what conditions
Firdowsi (i.e. Shariati himself) began his difficult task

and how he finally succeeded in reviving Iranian national identity, but he mentions the harsh punishment the great poet received at the hands of the jealous and the illwisher. Finally, Firdows'i regal reward came in, but too late, when his body was being carried out of the city for burial. And, his daughter refused to accept her father's reward.

Despite the public opinion, the molla of the city, however, refused to let Firdowsi's body be buried in the Muslim graveyard saying he had not lived a Muslim life. But, the molla finally received his punishment too: the king exiled him from Tus.

The piece ends with a verse from the Quran, which appears in the context of "destroying one's own home" and "exile": "Take warning, then, O ye with eyes (to see)!"

In Tehran, the "Ministry of Science" gives Shariati an office, asking him to "conduct research", and he does, for a short period of time: "Return To Self", clearly a "nationalist" response to Murtada Mutahhari's "pan-Islamist" Mutual Services of Islam and Iran (a lecture delivered in Muharram 1388 / June 1968), is the product of this period.¹²⁰

In his lectures, which called for Shariati's response, Mutahhari tries to paint a too rosey picture of the history of Islam in Iran: Islam and Iran were great blessings for each other. The Islamic conquest of Iran destroyed nothing

save the unjust power of the Sassanid kings and elite; it established brotherhood and justice, and helped Iranians, who had accepted Islam wholeheartedly and not under any compulsion, participate in building the Islamic civilization and culture. Iranians loved Islam, and put much energy in propagating its cause. Nationalism is not only a fake ideology, but a reactionary and harmful one too; it damages the unity of the Muslim world, which has the potential of oneday regaining its past glory.

Mutahhari goes too far in his arguments to put down all the religions he knows something about (Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Mazdakism, Manichaeism etc.) and all that serves as an element of Iranian nationalism (language, homeland, pre-Islamic history etc.), at the expense of glorifying the history of Islamic expansionism. Carried away by a strong spirit of "pan-Islamism" (rising to popularity after 1967 Arab-Israeli war), in these lectures, Mutahhari appears an atypical Iranian-Shi'ite scholar who conveniently overlooks many important historical facts, many of which the Shi'ites have traditionally pointed their finger at.

According to him, all was fine and dandy, and the Islamic period of Iranian history is incomparably more glorious than the preIslamic one.

In response, Shariati began with the notion of

"national identity" and "cultural alienation": Iran, the crossroad of many cultures, civilizations and religions, (and therefore both a "borrower" and "lender"), has constantly been engaged in cultural "self-enriching, and has also had several periods of alienation; but, after each period of alienation, a period of "disalienation" and "return to self" has taken place in her history. The Arab conquest of Iran, which is different from victory of Islam in Iran, paved the way, not only for the gradual acceptance of Islam by Iranians, but also for a Arab humiliation and alienation of Iranians. This coin has two sides: original Islam is a liberating ideology, and there is question about it; but, who can deny that Islam is not the only thing the Arabs offered us? "Return to self" in the Islamic period does not mean rejection of Islam; it in fact involves cultural "self-enriching" through genuine Islam as well. Islam does not reject nationalism; it in fact recognizes it as a genuine means of "mutual recognition" along the nations. Finally, "internationalism" is an already bankrupt ideology: manifested in Christianity of the medieval period, it did not only fail to unite Europe, but it seriously damaged national identities after shedding much blood. In the modern times, both capitalism and Marxism have attempted to create a new order: the former, through its "humanism", wants our "oil" and resources; the latter,

by advocating "class struggle", has given us the false impression that all the workers of the world, regardless of their national identity, have a common interest. As for us, there is not so much difference between the capitalist "metropole" and "mother Russia". "Islamic internationalism" as well is a case already tested and failed: One should carefully read the bloody history of Islamic Empire in order to realize what it is going to lead to in modern age.

SUMMARY OF SHARIATI'S ISLAM:

Since treatment of all what Shariati stood for is beyond the scope of this study, we must confine ourselves to a few essential remarks: As his main slogan was Islam, and as his Islam was quite different from that of the Ulama and the masses (20), his clash with both the Ulama and secular intelligentsia was inevitable. It is so appropriate to speak of "Shariati's Islam", which he "reconstructed" anew from all the necessary bits and pieces of the "degenerated" old faith. His Islam, for instance, has but one principle, "monotheism" (tawhid), which must manifest itself as absolute egalitarianism in society and history, rather than merely being a theological-philosophical notion with no social, economic and political bearing. In other words, his tawhid is a "world-view", the sum of all what the tenets of "Islam" (any true and divine religion) stand for. Adam, Shariati argues, is not the first human being, but rather a

mythological archetype representing "human existence" in the eternity of history. At one point in history, a "divine conspiracy", symbolized by the story of Adam (in the Old Testament and the Quran), makes man aware of his situation humaine and gives him the responsibility of acting as "vice-regent of God": man is responsible for shaping his own destiny on earth. Since he is made of "dust" and "God's spirit" (the lowest and the highest), in the existential state of *delaissement* and alienation, he has a choice to incline toward one pole or the other, to return to his "divine self" and thus become as high as God, or decline even further and thus become as low as dirt. Such is the internal human dialectic.

Shariati regards all "true prophets" as champions of this *tawhid* the ultimate state of disalienation who fought "polytheism" (*shirk*), which necessarily manifests itself as absence of egalitarianism in society and history. This "everlasting" battle between right and might, light and darkness, truth and reality, justice and injustice, has its roots in the myth of Cain and Abel, and it continues to the present. Human history is nothing but the history of this continuous battle of "religion against religion", in which the "true prophets" and the "oppressed" line up against men of *zar* (gold), *zur* (power) and *tazwir* (deception) i.e. the wealthy, the oppressive kings and the clergy. Islam as well

shares the gloomy destiny of all preceding religions. The battle is an unchanging "heritage", which each generation "inherits" and hands down to its following generation. In each generation, there is a "Moses", a "Pharaoh", a "Korah" and a "Bal'am Ba'ura", and one must chose a side between "right" and "might".

Victory of "right" over "might" is, nonetheless, inevitable, and it is summed up in the Islamic slogan "from God we come, and unto Him we are returning". This is the promise of final falah (salvation). If there was not promise, all human efforts would be "absurd" and leading nowhere out of this continuous vicious circle.

Obviously, Shariati does not consider Islam (or any religion for that matter) an end to itself, but a "means" through which a "sublime end", freedom of mankind from all "prisons", must be achieved. It follows, therefore, that the value of each act, rite, tradition etc. depends on its actual "function": there are instances in which "drinking wine" (forbidden in Islam) is equal to "saying prayers" or "circumambolation around the Ka'bah"; both of the latter acts and rites can be as bad if the prayer and pilgrimage happen to play an opposite function. Shariati redifines all the tenets of Islam in terms of their "original function", contrasting them with their "actual and present function". Hijab (veil of women) is an example: The question must be

addressed to its "function". At the beginning of Islam, it was a "status symbol", a mark of distinction between a "Muslim woman" and a "non-Muslim woman". In the old days of "pre-modernism", it symbolized women's lower status and deprivation. At the present, if it symbolizes "return to self" and a "protest" against "cultural assimilation", it is good.

The "Islam of Shariati" is, therefore, highly "functionalist", "symbolic", "interpretive" and "radicalist", and his hermeneutics is aimed at harmonizing Islam with the most modern ideologies and philosophies (such as pure Marxism and Sartrean existentialism), and with modern sciences (hence, for instance, his symbolic interpretation of the myth of genesis, thus brushing aside the "creationist-evolutionist" debate, and harmonizing Islam's view of man with Sartre's notion of *délaissement*).

THE END

Since Shariati advocated a radical political ideology by his Islam, he had his problems with the government as well. The idea of monotheism, as was mentioned, presents itself in his work as world view, ideology and social language. This was enough foundation for him to be justifiably accused of heavily borrowing from Western schools of thought, particularly existentialism and Marxism at the expense of Islam. Likewise, the secular

intelligentsia, mainly the Marxists, opposed him by arguing that such progressive ideas could not be derived from a fourteen century old school of thought. Shariati subjected both groups, both of whom ironically had a common word against him (each of course by its particular logic), to severe criticism and soon he found himself confronting them from both sides; one group as "defenders of faith", the other as "advocates of progress". In a sense, therefore, much of his work is nothing other than response to charges from the mullas and the Marxists.

Shariati's real fear was not from the latter group itself subject to persecution; it was from the first group who enjoyed enormous popularity and its fans were ready to shed his blood for the pleasure of God. But they saw it sufficient to ask his father to advise him¹²¹ and, if it did not work, to curse him and wish his death.¹²² This unskillful method gradually made Shariati a "living martyr" for the intelligentsia.

Beyond any doubt, the government watched him closely as a dangerous element, but it was glad to see him humiliate and disgrace both the clergy and the Marxists. Shariati's arrest had to wait till the government, in its miscalculation, had used him to the most possible extent. The government had failed to understand that the Ulama had their differences as well; that here as well, there was a

river of blood between the revolutionary and conservative wings; that a considerable number of progressive young Ulama supported Shariati's cause in principle, even though they disagreed with him in ideological and methodological details. Finally, the government had failed to appreciate the long-term impact of Shariati's teachings.

On the 12th of Mehr 1352 (October 4, 1973), the Ershad Institute was closed by political authorities, and Shariati, now the only remaining founding board member, went to hidings. His old father was arrested as an effective tactic of pulling Shariati out of his unknown sanctuary. After a few months of deliberation, which marks the arrest of many who happened to possess some of his writings or have supported him, Shariati gave himself up for the release of his father. While he was in prison, the SAVAK doctored one of his early undergraduate lecture notes, and published it in the semi-official newspaper, Kayhan, under the title Man-Marxism-Islam. The publication created a series of false impressions: that he had sold out to his jailors, that he regarded Marxism as a fallacy, and that his views on Marxism were raw and childish.

The dirty trick proved very effective, partly because Shariati was not in a position to be able to defend himself.¹²³ After eighteen months of imprisonment, Shariati

was released from prison but was, allegedly, exiled in his village Mazinan, under secret police surveillance. Nevertheless, he managed to continue writing and even participatig in semi-public gatherings. In fact, despite restrictions (Shariati's health being one), this period was as fruitful as it could be. Wrong are those who think of this period in Shariati's life as one totally devoid of literary achievements, for, much of his writings and oral words, of this period, even much more radicalist than ever before, have reached us.¹²⁴

Nonetheless, this period of Shariati's life is marked by clear paranoia, perhaps well-founded, that he was a target for assassination, of either a "zealot" or a "SAVAK agent". In an unfinished will, he writes:

"Death is in ambush every minute.
Conspiracies have beseiged me. I have lived
with death and been accustomed to conspiracy.
But I do not want to die now and like this.
I still have a lot to do. The eyes which are
more dear than life are anticipating me.

About the fourth Imam of the Shi'ites
-- the son of Husayn and the heir of
martyrdom -- I have said," the man who was
also deprived of the blessing of dying well
in his life". It is not a trivial pain. It

is a great pain for a man anxious to die well for his goal and belief to be befowled and then his mouth shot to prevent him from crying. This is an unbearable suffocation!

If I was not compelled to live, I would set myself afire in front of the [Tehran] university, the very spot where twenty-two years ago our Azar was burned in the flames of injustice in front of [Richard] Nixon. . .

What worries me is not dying unfinished. If death is carried out well, others will finish the task, and perhaps better. I fear Nefleh Shodan (a death with no impact); that after killing me the enemy may accuse the friends of having done so . . .

At any rate, I feel that I must write a will so that my heirs who are first of all the Tullab (students of theological seminaries) and university students and secondly the oppressed, the victims of ignorance and gold, and also the conscious ones who have not sold their conscience and honour for worldly affairs and are either men of religion or frankness, knew after me -- through the . . . dirty conspiracies,

accusations and tricks . . . -- who I was,
what I had and what I wanted.

1 - My world-view is a monotheistic one.
By this I mean, without falling into
Platonian game with ideas, Berkley's
phantomism, Hegelian idealism and nonsensical
thought of Hinduism and . . . "125

The will ends right here.

Finding life in Iran unbearable, Shariati finally left Iran for Europe on 26th of Ordibehesht 1356 (May 16, 1977). The details of his "flight" are not very well known; we know, however, that during this hijrat (emigration), he feared his life and took an uncommon route.¹²⁶ We also know that he wished to go to the United States of America to join his son¹²⁷, but before this happens, he was found dead on June 9, 1977 in his apartment. The British authorities ruled that he had died of massive heart attack (he was a heavy smoker); his supporters refused to believe anything short of Shah's secret police involvement. After all, Shariati belongs to a tradition which for fourteen centuries has believed that all its great leaders have either been killed by the sword of an oppressor or by the poison of a conspirator.¹²⁸ His "natural death" could not add as much fuel to the fire of revolution as his "martyrdom" could.

FOOTNOTES

1- Shahid Mutahhari, The One Who Exposed the Conspiracy: Interpretation of the "Outer Side" of Religion into the "Inner Side" of Atheism and Materialism, published by Daftar -e Entesharat -e Islami, Qumm. In this book, Shariati is put in the same category as "Kasravi", "Malcolm Khan", "Shariat Sangalaji" and many others, who demanded some kind of reform.

2- Many are under the impression that he was born in Mazian, a village near Sabzavar. His family name was ~~Mazinani~~, the name that he used as pen-name in some instances. The biographers must have also attempted to assign him to a humble origin in order to magnify his achievements. Considering that his father had moved to Mashad long before Shariati was born, the place of his birth is more likely to be Mashad, rather than the village of Mazinan.

3- Kevir p.XIX

4- See Shariati's Kavir, pp.2-29 where his autobiographical attempt appears. See also the interview with Shariati's father in Kayhan -e- Farhangi No. 11 where his family tree appears. From Shariati's genealogy the following can be traced: Mulla Qrbān Ali, known as "Akhund -e Hakim" (d.1318 /), son of Mullaz Hadi Bahmanabadi and grandson of Mulla Mehdi Bahmanabadi, was an expert of

Islamic philosophy. He studied in Bukhara, Najaf, Sabzavar and Mashad. "Allamah Bahmanabadi", the maternal uncle of "Akhund -e Hakim", taught Islamic philosophy, for a short period of time, in Sepahsalar of Tehran, under the patronage of Nasir al-Din Shah (r.1848-1896). He returned to Bahmanabad where he finally died. It was for his funeral that "Akhund -e Hakim" came to Bahmanabad, where the latter established a theological madrasah and recruited students from nearby villages. (He was asked by the villagers to stay as the replacement of Allamah, and he accepted the offer). "Akhund" had four sons: Mahmud, Ahmad (d.1336 /), Hasan and Husayn; all theologians. From Husayn, no child survived. Hasan is the father of Abd al-Karim Shariati, a -religious personality who no longer wears the traditional garb of a clergy. From Mahmud, who had studied philosophy under "Haj Fadil" and jurisprudence under others, three sons survived: Shaykh Qurban Ali, Muhammad Taqi (Ali Shariati's father), and Mirza Muhammad. Shaykh Qurban Ali goes to Mashad at the age of 14 where he (and later on his other two brothers) attend theological seminaries of Madrasah Fadhlkhan. Qurban Ali becomes a highranking scholar who, following the famous bloody riot of Gowharshad Mosque in the late 30th (see Fischer pp.97-100), leaves Mashad for Sabzavar, with the intention to come back after restoration of order. He is asked by the inhabitants of Mazinan to stay for good, and he

does. From Qurban Ali, one son, Shaykh Mahmud, has survived, who is currently the clergy of Mazinan.

Born and raised in the village of Mazinan in 1286 (1907), Muhammad Taqi moves to Mashad in 1306-7 at the age twenty. In order to move, first thing he must do according to regulations of the time, he must get an "identity card" before a passport can be issued for him. The agent in charge of issuing identity card does even bother to ask his opinion about the "family name" he must chose; he was from Mazinan, therefore, "Mazinani" sounded right.

Muhammad Taqi's both grandfathers were "ruhani"; his mother's father was a learned "sayyid", and, his paternal grandfather, Shaykh Mahmud, was a "ruhani" whose services many villages such as Sadkhar, Davarzan, Bizeh, Abrud, Saviz, Bahmanabad, Kohak, Ghaniabad and Kalateh used. Shaykh Mahmud returns to Mazinan for the occasion of his father's death. By popular demand, he stays there to take the place of his father and to keep the family theological center, "Madrasah Mulla Qurban Ali" working.

In Mazinan, Muhammad Taqi learns "muqaddamat", Arabic grammar, literature and some logic, under his father and uncle. His arrival in Mashad coincides with the beginning of Reza Shah's attempt to do away with theological seminaries. Like his other two brothers, he resides in Madrasah Fadilkhan. His father too poor to send him and his

brothers any considerable financial help.

Muhammad Taqi first studies under Shaykh Hashim Qazvini, Adib Bozorg and Adib Kuchak. After finishing Mutawwal and Mughni al-Labib (rhetoric), he studies Sharh Lum'ah (jurisprudence) under Shaykh Kazim Damghani, and sawanin (methodology of jurisprudence) under Shaykh Erteza and Haj Mirza Ahmad Modarress (known as "Nahang": "Wale"). Another master of his is "Mirza Isfahani", "whose sessions were attended by all the learned of Mashad, men such as Haj Shaykh Hashim Qazvini, Haj Shaykh Mojtaba Qazvini, Mirza Nowghani, Shaykh Mahmud Halabi, and, Mirza Jawad Aqa Tehrani". Jawad Aqa Tehrani's Arif wa Sufi Cheh Miquyand? (What Do the Mystic and Sufi Say?, are indeed the the thoughts of Mirza Isfahani put in Tehrani's words. Mirza Isfahani, however, mainly taught in Madrasah Nawwab. Very learned in philosophy himself, he was opposed to philosophy.

Muhammad Taqi begins teaching in modern "Sharafat" school in 1309 (1930), which he continues until 1313 (1934). Then he transfers himself to "Ibn Yamin" modern school (where Ali Shariati studies) as "principal". Having 700-800 students, some of whom attend "night school", it is a difficult job. He leaves home early in the morning, bows down to the grave of Imam Rida, attends the class of Sabzavari, leaves for modern school, and he manages to go home no earlier than midnight. Meanwhile, in this period,

he translates several historical novels of the Egyptian George Zaydan () to Persian. In 1330 (1952), however, he quits working for "government schools" because he realizes it is forbidden to be on the government payroll. He is encouraged by a friend, Mr. Fuyuzat, to help run "private schools". Under the encouragement of this friend, Muhammad Taqi writes an elementary school textbook of "religion and ethics" in 1321-2 (1942-3).

Beginning in 1320 (1941), the Tudeh Party beefs up its ideological and political activities. It even manages to recruit members from clerical elements, and it appears to have a great deal of influence in ministry of education: those who enter the party have a better chance to get promotion. Muhammad Taqi is tempted, but, he soon realizes that the temptation comes from Satan, and he refuses the proposal.

In order to struggle against the activities of the Tudeh Party in high schools, Shariati teaches 18 hours (later 24 hours) a week, and he offers to teach in "Danesh-sara" (teacher's training college) as well. Thanks to him, many communists return to Islam. He is the only one in Mashad who stands against communism.

Muhammad Taqi struggles against "Kasravi" and his ideas as well. Realizing Kasravi has a great deal of influence in "Medical College", (but not as popular as communism), he

invites the students of medicine to attend one of his lectures, in which he blasts Kasravi.

It is in 1320 as well, when the clergy insist that Muhammad Taqi should wear the garb of the ulama. He continues to refuse until Ayatullah Borujerdi comes to Mashad. Once again the clergy insist in the presence of the Ayatullah that he should enter the garb. "It is up to him to decide", Borujerdi says. Muhammad Taqi politely refuses on grounds that "there are many turbanned preachers; my presence in high schools and universities is better than putting on a turban and preaching from a pulpit in the mosque". Borujerdi agrees: "leave him to his way! It is better this way". Then, while sitting toward "Qiblah", Borujerdi prays for Muhammad Taqi.

It is in 1320 as well, when Muhammad Taqi establishes his Kanun -e Nashr -e Haqayeq -e Islami (Center for Propagation of Islamic Truths) in Mashad. Initially, it is centered in the house of Taher Ahmadzadeh (later on governor of Khurasan under Mehdi Bazargan). It is too small for the crowd. So, in one of his lectures, Muhammad Taqi tells the audience that "if you like this kind of preaching, you must prepare a place for it". A hall is rented, and some 400-500 people regularly attend.

Kanun is open three nights a week: Thursday nights for "Quranic exegesis" (polished notes finally published as

Tafsir -e Novin), Friday nights for "lecturing", and one night in the middle of the week for "training those interested to struggle against communism". The latter night is exclusive to some 17-18 high school graduates and those with a bachelors degree. In his Kanun lectures, Muhammad Taqi puts particular emphasis on Imam Husayn and the philosophy of his martyrdom: rather than "why should one cry for Husayn", he poses the question "why did Husayn rise" (transcript finally published as Chera Husayn Qiyam Kard).

The innovative activities of Kanun comes under public verbal attack from the traditional clerymen, who think Muhammad Taqi discourages people from "mourning", "crying" and "breast-beating" for Husayn. An investigating team of top preachers, including Muhammad Taqi Falsafi (a famous preacher), come to Mashad and to Kanun. Muhammad Taqi expects Falsafi to speak to the audience; but Falsafi and others insist that Muhammad Taqi should speak. Finally, the latter choses a verse of the Quran as his topic: "O Prophet! Truly We have sent thee as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner, -- and as one who invites to God's [grace] by His leave, and as a lamp spreading light." (Q.33:45-46); and he delivers an eloquent sermon in which he attributes each role of the Prophet to a particular segment of the clerical order, the collective heirs of Muhammad: Each must carry a different mission. The delighted Falsafi

consequently approves of Muhammad Taqi's method of preaching Islam, and the opposition of the traditional clergy toward Kanun is thus nullified.

In 1336, however, the activities of Kanun are interrupted for awhile, for Muhammad Taqi and 15 others (including Ali Shariati) are arrested, taken to Tehran in a military airplane, and jailed. Muhammad Taqi gets "a little more than a month".

In one of the meetings of Kanun, Muhammad Taqi meets Murtda Mutahhari, who, incidently, never spoke in Kanun. Years later, after the establishment of Erahad in Tehran, Mutahhari writes a letter to Muhammad Taqi, inviting him to Tehran. "We", Mutahhari writes, "even wanted to call it Kanun -e Nashr -e Haqayeq -e Islami; but, we did not do so because of politics". Mutahhari was right in his reasoning: the activities of Kanun, in particular the yearly celebration of Ashura in which some 12,000 people participated each year, had been banned by the government on political grounds.

Mutahhari, however, invites Muhammad Taqi to "come to Tehran for half a dozen lectures". Another letter, signed by the board of directors of Ershad follows. Ershad writes several letters to Ayatullah Milani, asking him to encourage Muhammad Taqi. Milani calls on Muhammad Taqi to accept the offer; the latter refuses on grounds of his bad health. As

Milani insists, he accepts.

First, he is scheduled to speak for five nights; it is then extended to ten nights; and Muhammad Taqi ends up staying in Tehran for over four years, to speak in Ershad and elsewhere.

Two years of this period, Taleqani is in prison. So, Muhammad Taqi is put in charge of "Masjid -e Hedayat". Even after Taleqani is finally freed, he insists that Muhammad Taqi should continue, at least for another year: and he does.

In this period as well, a group called "Lovers of Husayn" invite Muhammad Taqi to engage in public exegesis. He is in doubt whether he should respond positively to this invitation. After making "divination" with the Quran, however, he accepts it.

His religious activities in Tehran are, however, somewhat different: The author of voluminous Al-Ghaddir, Allamah Amini, who comes to pay him a surprise visit, informs him that "some money comes from Saudi Arabia for the purpose of propagating Sunni school of thought . . . A son of one of the X-clergymen leads the activity. It is your personal responsibility to speak on Shi'ism". Muhammad Taqi takes the responsibility, and the result is publishing of the transcript of his oral lectures under the title Khilafat va Imamat.,

Finally, once again, after Ali Shariati goes into hiding following the closure of Ershad, Muhammad Taqi is arrested in Mashad and put in jail in Tehran in; this time for 378 days.

He finally died in 1987.

5- For instance, Hakim Qumshah'i (d.1306 / 1888) and Mirza Jahangir Khan Qashqa'i (1243-1328 / 1827-1910). In this period, almost all Iranian philosophers live in isolation and seclusion. Jahangir Khan, for instance, meets his master (Qumshah'i) in a coffee-house; and Qumshah'i's dead body is discovered in his small madrasah room two days after his death.

6- Literally meaning "pot-house", kharabat is a mystical term which refers to a place (or a state of mind) in which the mystic receives inspiration. In many mystical poems, it appears as the "kharabat of the magi". In this context, Kharabat is the nickname for the coffee-house, in the outskirts of Tehran, where Qumshah'i teaches philosophy to Jahangir Khan. See Mutahhari's Mutual Services of Islam and Iran (Persian), vol.II, p.652

7- Kevir p.7

8- The last stage of mystical knowledge, when the person sees none other than God. See Kevir p.9

9- Tafsir -e Novin is his book; it is the modern interpretation of the last juz' of the Quran.

10- See MERIP Report (January 1982), Ervand Abrahamian.

11- See Kevir pp.2-29

12- Akhundism: A term coined to represent the reactionary world-view of Shi'ite clergymen; it means lack of clear and broad vision.

13- Hedayat, the author of "Blind Owl" is famous, in Iran for his "pessimism", and in the West for his genius. It is widely believed that many developed suicidal tendencies after reading his writings. In my case, it was the reverse; I read him as a young boy because I was suicidal!

14- A picnic place outside the city of Mashad.

15- Mathnawi is the philosophical masterpiece of Rumi. Iqbal of Lahore has called it "the Persian Quran". Like the Quran, it is recited with melody (there is special music for it), for both gaining wisdom and receiving consolation.

16- Collected Works, Vol.I, pp.99-100

17- Kevir p.89

18- ibid p.10

19- ibid p.15

20- The meaning of the term rowshanfekr is difficult to convey in English. Rowshan (clear) and fekr (thought, mind) is what the word is made of. Beginning with the Iranian constitutional era, the term has referred to those who have some knowledge about Western culture and wish for social change.

21- Jahatgiri -e Tabaqati, pp.33-34

22- ibid pp.35-36

23- See Coll. XXXI, pp.463-522. The letter is in response to Hopkins' invitation of Kashif al-Ghita to attend an anticommunist seminar. The latter refused, but instead, he sent the letter in which communism is pictured as a "lesser evil" than American Imperialism.

24-See Yad Nameh Shahid Javid, pp.7-8. Founded in Tehran 1323-24, the movement was still training its cadre and enriching its ideology when it split due to controversy over "overt or covert" method of political action during Musaddeq's nationalization of oil. Those who favored overt action branched out, and later on, they established the political party, Mardom. Those who favored covert action kept the original title, established several covert and semi-covert organizations, and began publishing some magazines. As early as 1331, the latter faction met Mehdi Bazargan and proposed establishment of an "Islamic Party (see Bazargan's Trial p.139). Shariati belonged to this faction when he wrote his Maktab -e VaseteH.

25-See Collected Works III, the introduction, and also notes on pp. 271-272.

26- For more details, see Collected Works vol.III

27- Du'a by Mehdi Bazargan,
published by Sherkat -e

Enteshar (1970). 2nd edition 1978 by Book Distribution Center of Houston, Texas.

28- Collected Works. XXXI, p.7

29- Reference to the verse of "light" in the Quran, where "the light of God" is said to be "neither Eastern nor Western". Interestingly, the "neither Eastern nor Western" currently means "neither capitalist nor communist".

30- Three students were killed in the demonstration protesting Richard Nixon's visit to Tehran. They are commonly known as "16 Azar martyrs", and the day is commemorated as Ruz -e- Daneshju (the day of university student) in Iran. A leftist magazine, published abroad is named "16 Azar", drawing its name from the incident. To what extent, it is not known to me, the marriage of Shariati was "political". At one point, however, in the state of despair, Shariati thinks about setting himself afire on the very spot where his sister in law had been slain (see Collected Works vol. I, p. 256).

31- See Keyhan Farhangi No. 11 for the alleged reason why Shariati was sent to Paris.

32- Another reason that Shariati could not have possibly translated Carrel's book.

34- Kevir pp. 48-49

35- ibid, pp. 128-129

36- ibid, p. 136

37- Collected Works I, p. 100

38- See Kavir p. 83 for example.

39- See for example, Collected Works vol. XXVII, pp. 288-290 and Kavir, pp.78-84.

40- See the interview with Shariati's father in Kayhan-e-Farhangi No. 11 and any biography written by his unconditional supporters.

41- See Nikki R. Keddie's "Roots of Revolution", p. 294

42- "I always wished to have money of my own so that I would be able to study philosophy or [literary] criticism, the two fields that I always loved. But, because . . . I was living on people's money [government scholarship], I rather decided to study what I thought would be beneficial for the people . . . This is what every student should do . . ." (Collected Works vol. 17, p. 153)

43-See Hamid Algar's translation of Gholam Abbas Tavassoli's biography of Shariati in "On The Sociology of Islam" where such irresponsible grandiose remarks have been made.

44- Not much of Shariati's poetry has survived. In his will, he wished his poetry to be destroyed.

45- Collected Works Vol. 22, pp. 320-321

46- " . . . there is no doubt that only by -- or at least with the help of -- a revolutionary organization one can inihilate the ruling regime. The important thing is

that when and how this revolutionary task is to begin . . .
 No revolutionary work has ever begun in absolute perfection.
 As soon as the revolutionary atmosphere comes to existence
 (in Iran, it has existed for years), one attempt and one
 spark, no matter how deficient, is enough to get the task
 moving. During action, the deficiencies will be overcome,
 and the stage of perfection and victory will come about" . . .

" . . . we have come to believe that only and only a
 group armed with guns and bombs -- and better yet equipped
 with airplanes, machine-guns and tanks -- will be able to
 devastate the ruling regime. That is it. At least the help
 of such a group is needed. The special cadre will begin to
 work 100% covert and without declaration of its dependence
 on the National Front. It will look for a training location
 . . ."

For more details, see Yad Nameh Shahid Javid, pp. 23-26

47- According to a reliable source, (Dr. Homayoon
 Amini), it was a joint venture in which Shariati
 participated too.

48- See Yad Nameh Shahid Javid, p. 31

49- Collected Works Vol. 17, pp. 160-70

50- Yad Nameh Shahid Javid, p. 31

51- Maktab -e- Mobarez vol. XXIII, pp. 131-148

52- Heard from the above mentioned reliable oral

source.

53- Followers of Shariati, who are always fond of portraying him as a martyr in life and death, have a long story about why he did not get a job. "Favertism", they allege, gave Shariati's job to a girl. His Totem Parasti speaks for the important facts.

54- See Totem Parasti.

55- In other places, he claims that it took him two years to translate Salman. At the most, it is the work of a month.

56- Totem Parasti p. 16

57- ibid.

58- Jahatgiri -e Tabaqati, pp.39-40. I have never met anyone who had a high opinion of this book. While it looks like the biography of Salman, it is in fact the notes Massignon had taken about the village of "Salmanpak" in Iraq. Shariati apparently mistook "Salmanpak" as "Salman -e Pak" (the pure Salman)!

60- Collected Works Vol. 27, pp. 3-77

61- Collected Works Vol. 25, p. 329

62- See my translation of Nowruz in Iranian Studies vol. XIX.

63- A great sufi, Ayn al-Qudat (492-525 / 1098-1130) was tortured to death by religious zealots because of his "unorthodox" views.

64- Bathth wa Shakwa (in Arabic) or Dard -e Del (in Persian) refers to "pouring one's sad and heavy heart out to someone else for the sake of receiving consolation").

65- See introduction of Kevir

66- ibid

67- A Shi'ite radical personality brutally martyred by Umayyad caliph, Mu'awiyah.

68- "Fazael -e Balkh" is what Shari'ati translated and annotated in order to get his doctorate degree. "Ziyarat -e Ashura" is a Shi'ite text of "divine greetings upon Husayn and curse upon those who killed Husayn".

69- For more about Ershad, see Sharough Akhavi's Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran, pp. 143-144.

70- "Man and Islam" is poorly translated into English by Dr. Fatollah Marjani. Published by FILINC of Houston.

71- Collected Works Vol. 24, see the table of contents

72- ibid, p. 309

73- ibid, p. 331

74- See Algar's "Sociology of Islam"

75- Heard from professor Michael Hillman, a personal friend of Shariati, who he had begged to take some of his work out of the country. Hillman refuses.

76- Collected Works, vol. 27, pp. 288-290.

77- ibid.

78- In the footnote, Shariati explains how his

acquaintance with Massignon could possibly be so long. He begins with the day that, in Iran, for the first time, Massignon's name is mentioned to him!

79- "Arjang" is the name of Mani's book. It is not clear what Shariati allegorically refers to here.

80- Collected Works, vol. 27, pp. 263-265.

81- Collected Works, vol. 31

82- Tamaddon va Tajaddod p. 7

83- ibid, p. 23

84- ibid, p. 29

85- Collected Works, vol. 31, p. 277

86- See Shariati's introduction to Marzanak's Hujr ibn Adi.

87- Ali, Abarmard -e Tarikh, p. 29

88- That Shi'ism is an Iranian invention, is a notion publicized mainly by orientalist. Shi'ites totally disagree.

89- Ali's Life After His Death, p. 6

90- ibid

91- Collected Works, vol. 31

92- Collected Works, vol. 31, p. 324

93- ibid, p. 327

94- ibid

95- ibid, p. 324

96- Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 258

97- *ibid*, p. 259

98- *Collected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 242-243

99- *ibid*

100-This is Nasser Khosrow's famous verse: "I am not one of those poets who throw their Persian pearl in front of the pigs".

101-*Collected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 250-55

102-Repetition is a rule rather than exception in Shari'ati's works -- despite the claim of Algar and TaVassoli to the contrary.

103-*Collected Works*, vol. 8, p. 78

104-Monzer, pp. 80-83

105-*Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 24

106-*Collected Works*, vol. 22

107-See my translation of the entire text; not published yet.

108-The text was poorly translated into English by Laleh Bakhtiar, published by Shariati Foundation of Tehran

109-The text appears in *Collected Works*, vol. 22, pp. 57-170

110-See Tashayyu' Alavi vs.

Tashayyu' Safavi, pp. 115-119

111-The text has been translated several times into English. My translation of it will appear in *Man Without Self*, a forthcoming publication by IRIS of Houston Texas

112-Translated into English at least twice; once by Dr. Fatollah Marjani and once by me. My translation of it will appear in Man Without Self, a forthcoming publication by IRIS of Houston Texas

113-Collected Works, vol. 22, pp. 286-288

114-

115-For Shariati's view on Shahadat, see Jihad and Shahadat, texts translated by me and edited with the help of Dr. Gary Legenhausen of TSU.

116-For the entire text, see Collected Works, vol. 7, pp. 1-168

117-For the entire text, see What Is To Be Done?, translated into English by Farhang Raja'i, pp. 71-101. Published by IRIS of Houston 1986.

118-See Qasetin & Nakesin & Mareqin

119-Collected Works, vol. 22, pp. 199-211

120-I have translated these two texts; both are forthcoming publications of IRIS of Houston

121-Collected Works, vol. I, pp. 3-41

122-At least once, such a gathering was held in Yazd in the house of a certain clergyman. Public cursing was however more common and Shariati pities one of them in his memoirs. See Col.I, pp.17-18.

123-See preface to Collected Works, vol. 24

124-Almost the entire Collected Works II and IV as well

as some other works, including much in XXIII, belongs to this period. See Coll. II, p.279 and the date of his mutilated Sokhan -e- Adam in Collected Works XXIII for the gatherings he attended in this period.

125-Collected Works, vol.1, pp.257-258

126-See Yad Nameh Shahid Javid p.55

127-See his Collected Works, vol. I, p. 263

128-The Shi'ite belief concerning the death of "the fourteen infallibles" as well as many other prominent figures. Similar belief was held for many "mysterious deaths", such as those of the highly popular wrestler, Takhti, the writers such as Samad Behrangi, Jalal Al-Ahmad and many others, during the reign of Pahlavi Dynasty. An example of such "mysterious death" in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the late Ayatollah Taleqani. Some believed he was killed.

HAJJ

SHARIATI'S INTERPRETATION OF A RITUAL

Ka'bah yek sang -e- neshani -st keh rah gom nashavad.

Hajj! Ehram -e degar band bebin yar koja -st.

The ka'bah milestone, not to lose the way.

O pilgrim! do it again and see where the beloved is.

--Naseraddin Shah

Hajj, pilgrimage to the "House of God" in Mecca, is the most complicated ritual in Islam; not only complicated for its important minute details, but it also begs for explanation (and interpretation). The Arab philosopher, Abu al-Ala of Ma'arrah (363-449/973-1057), wondered why people should come all

the way from the four corners of the world in order to touch a black stone and simply return home. The Iranian poet, Naser Khosrow of Qubadiyan (394-481/1023-1088), after questioning a pilgrim who had just returned from Mecca, proved that the trip was vain unless one knew the meaning of each act. There is also a story about a sufi master whose disciple came to him to say "good bye" for going to Hajj. "Put the bag of your money on the floor", the master said, "and circumambulate around me instead." Since the heart of the mystic is the house of God as well, the instruction was supposed to reward the pilgrim a valid Hajj, and save him time, energy and money.

There are many such stories, old and new, which question why a Muslim should take the trouble of performing the complicated rite, which seems to be, almost entirely, "meaningless." Answer to this time honored question is what Shariati tries to give in his Hajj, his highly romantic personal reflections on the complicated ritual.

In the case of Islamic rituals in general, the primary issue for Shariati was the symbolic function of the rite and its interpretability into a meaningful progressive and revolutionary message. For every religious rite, as for the religion itself, we are

instructed by the Iranian mystic poet, Rumi (604-672 / 1207-1273), there is form and there is content; *pust* (shell) and *maghz* (meat). The shallow minded would concern themselves with the shell which is apparent, while the deeply rooted in knowledge would look beyond the shell in search of the hidden meat. In Shariati's view, behind every rite, there is a metaphorically conveyed purpose that one could discover by meditating upon it, and without which the rite would be an empty shell or worse yet, filled with something other than its original meat.

Hajj, we should know, is a once in a lifetime obligation for any Muslim who can afford to participate, and there are those who have performed it several times. It takes place only once a year during a universally specified period (the first half of the last lunar month) when anyone who has the duty gathers from all over the world in Mecca. The ritual is quite an elaborate one.

There are three parts in Hajj: First, there is the individual farewell; before taking the trip, the pilgrim visits his kin, neighbors and friends, a combination of seeking the pleasure of those toward whom the potential pilgrim may have some moral, social and economic obligations as well as the announcement of

one's intention: in order to be ready to meet God, one must pay his debts, reestablish damaged and broken friendships, and take care for the affairs in which the rights of another individual is involved. And, those whom one formally goes to for "farewell" have the moral obligation of coming to see him upon his return.

Second, there is the actual rite of Hajj, the details of which are hair-splittingly written in treatises; the illiterate having of course to depend on the oral and simultaneous inculcation of the well-paid experts. There are two parts in the ritual itself; the minor Hajj or Umrah as it is called, and the "greater Hajj," both explained in religious texts.

The third part takes place when the pilgrim, now referred to as Hajj, returns to his hometown, and people come to visit him. "Hajj" tells the story of his experience to the interested audience, and wishes that God grant such a blessing for every Muslim. Shariati's Hajj is not unlike the storytelling of a pilgrim just returned.

Unlike the booklets of Hajj issued by grand jurists, in which the details of each rite is hair-splittingly explained without any meaningful interpretation of the events, Shariati's Hajj attempts at symbolic interpretation. His is not a "do it

yourself" book of ritual for the lettered, but an exegesis for those in search of meaning.

Shariati's most striking point of departure is that Hajj is an "allegorical drama." God is its director, man (regardless of his sex and social status) is its only character, and Mecca is its scene. One goes to Hajj in order to play the role of Abraham, the main character of the play, as well as the role of Hagar, Abraham's mother and Ishmael's mother. A good actor should become so obsessed with the character he/she plays, that he/she develops the attributes the character. In other words, the drama of Hajj is supposed to transform the personality of its participant into that of the original characters, namely that of Abraham.

The pilgrimage, according to Shariati, is also a visit paid to the land of the prophet of Islam and reliving the twenty three years (thirteen years in Mecca and ten years in Medina) of his mission in approximately twenty three days (thirteen days in Mecca and ten days in Medina). In short, it is returning the clock back to fourteen centuries ago and beyond that to the time of Adam.

Hajj, Shariati argues, is a hukm -e- mutashabih (metaphoric commandment), very much like ayah

mutashabih of the Quran. As the Quran divides its verses into muhkam and mutashabih, so are the religious commandments categorized. What makes understanding of a mutashabih commandment difficult is its metaphoric and multi-interpretable language, and in the case of Hajj, it is more difficult because its language is not made of lafz (words) but of harekat -e- samit (silent movement). Furthermore, it is not only its language which is metaphorical, but its content as well. It has something to teach each generation. Hajj does not want to present a single idea, commandment or value; Hajj is Islam in its totality. The Quran is Islam in words; imam is Islam in humanity; and Hajj is (Islam) in harkat (movements). It is as if God poured in Hajj all what he has wished to convey to mankind: philosophy of existence, monotheistic world-view, philosophy of creation of man, movement of history, stages of man's evolution from its appearance on earth to the highest peak of its final perfection...the principle of "constant" change"... (p.19). In a general sense, Hajj is man's existential movement toward God, a metaphorical play of the philosophy of the creation of mankind, an objective incarnation of whatever is presented in this philosophy; in one word, Hajj is the theatre of creation, at the same time it is theatre of

history, the theatre of monotheism, the theatre of maktab (ideology), the theatre of ummat (a society based on faith, a community that Islam wishes to establish among mankind)... which director is God, which language is movement and the main characters are Adam, Abraham, Hagar, and Iblis (Satan), its scenes, the Haram region, Masjid al-Haram, Mas'a, Arafat, Mash'ar and Mina; its symbols: Ka'bah, Dafe, Marwah, day, night, sunset, sunrise idle, sacrifice, garment, makeup (Ihram, Halq, Taqsir...) ... and actors? Only one person! You(!) whoever you might be, woman, man, old, young, black, white,...you play the first role in the antagonism of God and Satan." (pp.21-22)

Shariati begins with philological definition of Hajj (intention, goal and movement toward goal), contrasting it with the ordinary everyday life which is full of emptiness, stagnation and repetition, a passive dissection of "the two black and white mice which gradually chew away the rope of life." "Hajj is your rebellion against this idiotic fatalism, this wicked fate like that of Sisyphus; it is an exit from the fluctuation, doubt and loop of life; from production for consumption, from consumption for production." With a Niyat -e- Engelabi (a revolutionary intention) the loop opens away and emigration from "one's own

house" to "the house of God," to "the house of people," top "eternity," begins. Whoever the pilgrim may be, he/she is metamorphosed and alienated by history, life and anti-human social system. These factors have alienated him/her from his divine self, making him forget that he is the vice-regent of God heavy mission, he has been engaged in a sort of life which results in khusran (loss of the capital). He has become money, passion, stomach, lie, ... empty! ... (p.26-28). In contrast, Hajj symbolizes man's return to the straight path of infinite emigration toward God.

When the pilgrim says farewell for Hajj, it is as though he/she was getting ready to die. He pays his debts, clears off offenses, seeks the pleasure and forgiveness of others and purifies his property that he is leaving behind. He is to write his will; therefore, in a sense, Hajj is practicing one's readiness for death. It is a ritual dying by choice before the real death.

Hajj is also answering the call of Abraham, the founder of Islam, the champion of monotheism. At Migat (the time-place), one is to take off his clothes, which symbolizes his distinction and cover, just like a snake which shakes off his old skin, and wear a shroud-like unsewn garment, which makes him/her look like any other

participant. Here the person no longer exists; it is humanity as a whole which exists. Having worn the garment of monotheism, the pilgrim, who is now muhrim (tabooed), presents himself to God by saying prayers and observes a series of meaningful taboos:

One is not supposed to look in the mirror to see himself, to wear perfume or makeup, to order someone else to do things, to harm a creature no matter how small, to uproot a vegetation, to hunt, to have sexual intercourse, to get married or participate in marriage ceremony, to have argument with others, to lie or act proudly, to wear sewn garment, to pick up arms, to cover his head even under the ceiling, to wear socks and shoes, to shorten his hair and fingernails, to do anything which may cause bleeding, to swear; and a woman is not supposed to observe usual Islamic dress code.

It is with such preparations that the astonishingly large group of pilgrims pour toward Masjid al-Haram (The "Sacred" and "forbidden" Mosque), chanting Labbayak! (God, I am coming!). It is as though one was approaching self-annihilation. At the entrance of Mecca, there is the sign indicating the limit of Haram region, within which shedding blood and uprooting vegetation are forbidden. As the pilgrim

passes the sign marking his entrance, he no longer chants, but becomes abruptly silent. Now the pilgrim is descending into the valley; the more he descends, the closer he gets to the "House of God", which is situated in the middle, the lowest region of the valley. What is Ka'bah? An empty cube, lacking architectural eloquence; it is not even the grave of anybody! It is by meditation upon this empty cube, symbolizing the six directions one feels in thinking of the absolute, for the understanding of which one's philosophizing has always failed, that one realizes that Ka'bah yek sang -e- neshani -st keh rah gom nashvad (the cube is only a milestone so that one does not lose the path); that here is the rendezvous of God, Abraham, Muhammad and the people. (p.53)

The House of God is also the "house of people", built by Abraham and his son Ishmael. A few miles away from his hometown, according to jurisprudence, a Muslim is considered Musafer (traveller) and is supposed to only perform half of his four rak'at prayers. Such is not the rule in the house of God, which is in fact the house of every Muslim. In the House of God, which is also the house of the people, despite the distance, no matter how far, one is not considered traveller, for, he is in his own house.

Attached to Ka'bah, is a crescent-like building, the grave of Hagar, the wife of Abraham, the mother of Ishmael, a black Abbysinian slave-woman. for the circumambulation to be proper, the pilgrim is to go round -- not only the Ka'bah, but also -- the grave of this woman-slave who is the permanent neighbor of God, the unknown soldier of the nation of Abraham.(p.59)

The pilgrim is supposed to touch Hajer al-Aswad (the black stone), which symbolizes the hand of God, thereby taking an oath of allegiance with Him, liberating himself from all previous allegiances. Then, one is to circumambulate around the Ka'bah seven times; seven symbolizing the number of the days of creation of the world, the number of Hagar's efforts in search of water for the infant Ishmael, and the number symbolizing infinity. Once the seventh circumambulation is completed, the pilgrim leaves the act and stands on Magam (footstep) of Abraham to say prayers. A minute ago, he was a particle in circumambulation and now he is standing on the footprint of Abraham! He has now become an Abraham himself. Stepping on the footprint of Abraham means that one should be what Abraham was; to do as he did. Just as Abraham, by the command of God, drew the knife to sacrifice his beloved son Ishmael, one is to declare

his readiness to sacrifice what he loves most, for the love of God. But, before Abraham did this, he had passed through many episodes: breaking the idles, devastating Nimrod, experiencing fire, battling with the Satan . . .; he went a long way from being an idle-carver to the founder of the temple of monotheism, the first house of the people. The father and the son build the house; the father was saved from the fire of Nimrod, and the son was saved from being sacrificed!

After the prayer on the place of Abraham, the pilgrim begins Sa'y (the ordeal), paving seven times the some three hundred meter distance between the two mountains of Safa and Marwah; symbolizing the effort of Hagar in search of water for her infant Ishmael. In circumambulation, the pilgrim plays the role of Hagar, then that of Abraham, and now again, he plays the role of Hagar. Indeed, in this context, Abraham and Hagar are but names; both represent the same reality.

Circumambulation symbolizes determination, love and trust; Sa'y, the human reason, praxis and effort. In the former, the pilgrim plays the role of a butterfly orbiting a candlelight; in the latter, he is an eagle in search of bait. In the former he experiences the spirit of the Orient; in the latter, that of the rational West. Circumambulation is God and nothing

else; Sa'y is nothing but human. The former is spirit and nothing else; the latter is but matter. The former is suffering of existence; the latter is the joy of living, the earthly tranquility. The former is search for thirst; the latter is search for water. And, therefore, Hajj is a dialectic; the solution; the solution to the eternal debate between materialism and idealism, reason and illumination, this world and the hereafter, prosperity and asceticism, the manas of heaven and those of the earth . . . , fatalism and determinism, trust in God and human praxis...

Abraham and Hagar are champions of both, "faith" "reason." Through reason, Abraham finds god, and through blind faith, he attempts to sacrifice his beloved son. Thanks to her total submission to the will of God, Hagar trusts to leave her infant in the heart of the valley; on the basis of reason, she searches for water.

At the completion of the seventh Sa'y, the pilgrim is liberated from taboo; just like Hagar who went empty-handed to her Ishmael, one leaves the minor Hajj in order to prepare for the greater Hajj on the ninth of the month of Dhu al-Hajjah.

THE GREATER HAJJ:

It begins on the ninth of the month. It is the

beginning of Hajj. It is not too important where you are, in the hotel, on the street, or what have you. You must wear your Hajj garment and leave Mecca behind. How strange: the greater Hajj is not "going to Mecca," but returning from it! You must head for Arafat, which is on the east side. On your way back to Ka'bah, you must pause in two places : Mash'ar and Mina.

On the ninth day, you must stay in Arafat: you must pause in Mash'ar at night. On the tenth and eleventh (on the thirteenth too), you must stay in Mina. The way is some 25 kilometers. In Mash'ar, you must collect 70 small stones. On the tenth, you must perform ramy (stoning the Satan) and sacrifice, but you must stay for three days.

Now, you must go back toward Ka'bah, without entering the grand mosque. One should think of the meaning of these names: "Arafat" (a cognate of arafa: "to know and understand"), Mash'ar (place of consciousness), and Mina (a cognate of muna: "love"). The first, according to Islamic sources, is the place where, for the first time after eating the "forbidden fruit," Adam and Eve met and "knew" each other. How strange that "consciousness" comes after "knowing!"

As the sun of Arafat sets, you must leave for Mash'ar where, at night, you must gather stones (i.e.

"weapons") and wait for the sun of the following day to rise, for, on the following day, you must wage war against Satan and offer a sacrifice. What kind of stones should you collect? they must be soft, round, smaller than walnut, larger than pistachio: you must collect "bullets!" On the following day, as a soldier of Abraham, each of you must cast 70 of these "bullets" at the heart of the enemy. When you shoot, those which do not hit the target, do not count. So, if you cannot shoot accurately all the time, you must have gathered more than 70. If you shoot less than 70, you are not considered a good soldier; it is as though you had not participated in Hajj! Remember that you should stay in Mina for three days. On the first day, you must cast seven in one attack only; those stones which do not hit are not to be counted. On the second and third day, you must attack three times, each time seven bullets. So far, you have shot 49 bullets. On the fourth day, if you stay here, you must continue to fight: three attacks, seven stones in each. But, you can leave if you wish.

What should you shoot at? There are three symbols: you must, not with the first or the second, but with the third!

--Did you hit?

--Yes I did.

--How many?

--Seven.

--Did they all hit?

--Of Course!

--Did you hit the feet and the stomach?

--No.

--Its back?

--No.

--On its head?

--Yes.

--You have accomplished the task. Now, there is one more thing you should do today: declare your victory by offering a sacrifice! After the sacrifice, you are free to take the garment of Hajj off and wear your regular clothes. After sacrificing your Ishmael, you are an Abraham!

On the second, third, (and fourth) day, you begin shooting the stones from the first symbol. If you want to leave on the fourth day, you are required to bury the rest of your stones.

What do these three idols, the "trinity," which you must stone, represent? the three evil powers: the "wealthy," the "king" and the "clergy" (p.181)

A MONTH AMONG THE BELIEVERS

Ramadhan in the Islamic Society of Greater Houston

Introduction

The following paper is the product of my thirty days of field work among a Muslim community in a non-Muslim land. The method of investigation utilized was that of "participant observer", rather than an alien "fact finder". It is not self-praise to say that such a study could not have taken this shape or yielded the same material if it were conducted by a non-Muslim or a Muslim lacking extensive knowledge of Islam, not to mention Arabic, Persian, French, as well as English. My approach was first to tell the authorities of my intentions. Then, as any other Muslim would, I participated in the activities. Very few of those I interacted with realized that their conversations, monologues, emotional displays, etc., were being preserved for posterity. I seldom took a pad into the field for immediate recording, and so I perhaps lost a degree of accuracy, but had I done so, the subject of my observation would have been different from the natural state I intended to record. A notepad, a tape recorder, a camera -- any recording device except my memory would have altered the circumstances drastically. When people know they are being recorded, they automatically edit themselves. If it is a camera, they pose; if it is a recorder, they avoid sensitive

issues or any statement which might make them appear ridiculous, irrational, illogical, or otherwise unfavorable. A pad can have even more disadvantages, for one can either observe or record, but not both simultaneously. Action and speech move much faster than the pen. Not only this, but also one must explain why one is writing down what may not seem worthy or appropriate for recording.

If in some instances my memory has failed me, it was unavoidable. I have not purposely fictionalized any details in the name of reconstruction. I have referred to individuals in this study by their actual names, although in several cases I did not find the proper context to inquire about this detail. In a Muslim community, comprised mostly of non-Westerners, one may not always ask such a question. When they greet for the first time, Muslims do not customarily exchange names, but simply say "brother" or "sister". Despite assumptions regarding a few details, which I have attempted to identify as such, I believe accuracy is the rule with very few exceptions. My notes were dictated immediately following each day or period of observation. Still I must admit inherent limitations in doing justice to the subject matter, because I have attempted to present live activities and voices of a community through dead, written words. I have turned the oral into the written and much has been lost in the process.

Nevertheless, I hope the information that has been gathered is accurate and useful.

As a participant, on several occasions, I successfully attempted to create fertile situations out of which I was able to gather more insight. I consider my methods in the tradition of Eleanor Smith Bowen (Laura Bohannon), as exemplified in her *Return to Laughter*. This, I believe, is a legitimate action, for any other participant could have willingly or otherwise done this for me, and indeed they did. Sometimes I would pose a question or bring up a certain subject I hoped would provide useful material. If I did so, especially while involved in some activity, I was in no way set apart from the community. Constantly there were questions posed by others, issues raised spontaneously, as well as the point of view of the uninitiated interjected, for all opinions, if kept in moderation, are well received in the community. The material in this paper is more than observation. I have reflected on and interpreted many of the situations, of course in light of personal biases and training. Whether accurate or inaccurate in objective terms, these reflections are mine, and I take responsibility for them. Although I claim this monograph to be the product of thirty days in the field, on some days I observed nothing but a repetition of the events of other days. Even though I may be biased, I judged there to be no worthwhile material

on those days which I have not mentioned in the paper. I decided not to bore the reader with repetitions. The participants had not come for the sole purpose of staging a month-long drama for my benefit, and certainly I lack the imagination of a novelist. Fiction is not my field of expertise; so I recorded what I deemed observable, and then, in some cases, I bestowed my anthropological interpretation on it.

Cultural anthropology resembles allegorical exegesis in many respects. The anthropologist does not only treat "culture" as text which he interprets, but he also keeps, or should keep, in mind that such "text" suggests more than what it reveals to a superficial eye, such as that of a wishy-washy journalist, overwhelmed by the "strange and fanatical" behavior of a hitherto "unknown" and "negligible" people. To the anthropologist not only do the "social facts" exist, but also they are supposed to contain "meanings" which require more than observation. If society is a "text", the social facts are "words" which stand for "things" other than themselves. This is particularly true of those societies in which there is a considerable and increasing awareness concerning symbolism, and everything is a microcosm of a macrocosm. Therefore in analyzing, for example, the public daily prayers of the Muslims, the anthropologist may reach the issue of sociopolitical

leadership in movement toward a specific goal: note, for instance, that there is individual self-purification according to collective rules. Ablution marks the end, not the beginning, of such self-purification. Then there is the call (Azan) for "joining". Then the individual abandons his individuality and immerses himself into the public by standing behind Imam (leader) who is facing the Mihrab (altar), all Mihrabs facing the one House of Allah in Mecca. From the same root as Mihrab comes the word Harb (warfare). The Muslims stand in line the way they would stand at the time of warfare. by praying they battle against the forces of evil. Imam begins every act and the "followers" follow at least a second later. Despite the fact that "followers" know the procedure, if they act intentionally before Imam, their prayer is void. Thus the anthropologist may see public prayer as a symbol or microcosm of social leadership. The yearly pilgrimage of Hajj is a ritual, yet it is possible and useful to look upon it as a microcosm of the egalitarian Muslim utopia or the day of resurrection, in which no one has more than a white shroud.

Thus ritual of prayer, Hajj pilgrimage, etc. should mean more to the anthropologist than to the expert merely of rituals. Rubba Hamila Fiqhin Laisa bi Faqihin. So many carriers of jurisprudence are not experts of jurisprudence. In the words of rumi, for religion there is pust (shell) and

Maghz (meat). Rumi might have decided at one point in his life to throw away the shell to the asses and keep the meat, yet who can deny that it is the shell that preserves the meat? The fact that words represent things other than themselves does not make us needless of words.

To come to the issue of this monograph, the Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) is not merely a "religious institution" among many exotic religious institutions in the American melting pot; it is a Muslim "United Nations". Nay! What is nationality to a Muslim? Muslim are brothers, regardless of their social origins. More than once in this field work, I was corrected by others, who put in my mouth, "I am a Muslim," when I said I was Iranian. ISGH is a melting pot in itself. In a community like ISGH, people of almost every Muslim country constantly meet, exchange ideas, inspire each other, and individuals can glimpse events and trends in each other's homelands. Here the differences are temporarily halted or even compromised for the sake of a superior goal, namely that "Islam overcomes all religions" as it is destined by Allah (Q. 9/33; 48/28; 61/9). At the most one can say that the latter melting pot has received inspiration from the former. American religious tolerance has long afforded a suitable breeding ground for fundamentalism and radicalism as well as being a pattern of liberalism in itself. It is under the comforting shadow of

tolerance that ideas can be synthesized in order to produce new ideas or merely to reformulate the old ones. It is only in such an atmosphere that one can easily put new wine into old bottles, or old wine into new bottles. This is especially true of Muslims, who in their lands rarely feel secure enough to do so, because it will rock the boat of politics -- by "politics" is meant the artificial and imported notion of separation of church and state. In Islam religion is politics and vice versa. The ghost of Muslim nostalgia has for almost a century been haunting the very foundation of the political machinery. There have been attempts, some successful and some otherwise, to abolish the fake division between the two sides of the coin of Islam, that is to say, religion and politics.

In such societies as ISGH, one sees the model of desired Muslim community and leadership. It was in the context of such society that several years ago a group of Muslim intellectuals, who were dissatisfied and somewhat hopeless to improve the societies of their origin, decided to buy an island, perhaps off the coast of Greece, in order to establish a model Islamic society. The idea was to show that Islam was not merely an idealistic utopia but a complete and practical system of life, the establishment of which is hindered only by the corruptness of hitherto existing pseudo-Muslim societies. The decision was never

put to practice. The lost hope was recovered on the eve of the recent Iranian revolution. The theoretician decided to implement it in his own country.

Whatever the narrow perception of the West may be of Islam, this religion and its principles have a great deal of appeal to their adherents. Muslims have shown that they are not ready to replace it with western liberalism. No wonder then that the American attempt to reverse the Iranian situation by invoking the magic words of human rights, freedom, and material well-being never worked effectively against the Iranian fundamentalism. A long time ago I had a long discussion at ISGH with a rich young man from Kuwait. Despite the fact that he was Sunni, he was a staunch supporter of Khomeini. "What do you lack that Khomeini can give you in Kuwait?" I asked. He replied, "Islam." Then he added that without Islam you could have the whole world and still have nothing. With Islam, you could do without the world. "Money is the filth that is suffocating us. We need purification." Of course, I did not take him seriously. I did, however, take the idea as representing the glimpse of revolutionary fever of Islam, even in as filthy rich a country as Kuwait. Some people, of course, have recently been disillusioned concerning the Islamic Republic of Iran. For them, it is no longer a desirable model. The information has leaked to the community that

there is political repression, lack of tolerance, and monopoly of power in Iran. Yet it is sheer naivete to think that the Islamic Republic has lost its appeal among these Muslims. As one phrased it, "Allah is the greatest! For him and in his way, no sacrifice is too costly. As a Muslim, what would you choose, pleasure of Allah or freedom? Pleasure of Allah or your worldly desires? You oppose war and I may oppose it too. But Quran says: Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth, ye know not . . . (Q. 2/216). One is not to judge the Islamic revolution by western criteria but by Islam. What does the West know about good and evil? If they knew they would reform their filthy society of sex, alcohol, and consumerism. What is going on here is a striving for more pleasure of oneself. We Muslims, who believe in the hereafter, should not seek self-pleasure, but we should seek the pleasure of Allah. You see, brother, everything is a test of faith for us."

For me the most striking lesson in the field work has been confrontation with a different logic operating above utilitarianism. If the pleasure of Allah is at stake, a true Muslim should put aside his worldly desires. Nevertheless, I must admit that the function of this logic I

found superficial. Everyone gives lip-service to it, but only a few practice it. Muslims are, as expected, very pragmatic. They know it is very difficult and sometimes even impossible to be a true Muslim. In this respect, most Muslims of ISGH are little different from those Christians who become Christians once a week. As they leave the premises of the mosque, they function as any other member of American society would: the restaurant owner may sell beer; the young may watch Michael Jackson on MTV; the pro-Khomeini pamphleteer may have a Christian wife and work for the city; the one who talks so loudly about the corruption of Saudi Arabians may work at the Saudi Educational Mission. No one likes to admit or dwell upon these things, but everyone knows, or should, that life is full of contradictions. Yet everyone agrees that a Muslim should never forget he is a Muslim and he is for a cause. Again, as one put it, "The greatest Jihad is waging war against oneself, to push oneself to realize that he is a drop in an ocean."

Like any other social study, this humble investigation cannot but be an open ended study. The society goes on after the student finishes his work, and in no way do I claim that my findings are sheer facts. Yet I claim very strongly this paper represents my conscientious reading of my observations. But I did have to limit the scope of my observation due to practical necessity. ISGH is a center

with satellites. I decided to focus only on the center and leave the satellites perhaps to another project. Since the times of the various activities are fixed, I could not have been at different places simultaneously. It would be wrong then to draw a quick rule of thumb out of my study and apply it to all the Muslims in Houston, let alone to all those in the United States. Each community must be studied separately, if one is to attempt to delineate any general rule.

Several dominating elements impress themselves upon the observer from the data in this study. First there is the steady growth and expansion of the community. From the humble origin of private gatherings in 1968, the Society has grown into a fairly large institution with extensive future plans, including the building of a grand mosque featuring Islamic architecture as well as the establishment of a private radio station. There are already two satellite masjids and more are expected in the future. In short, Islam in the West is a "growing church", comparable to other flourishing institutions.

The situation of the Muslim minorities in the U.S. is not at all the same as the predicament of the minorities in Muslim lands. To be more precise, in the U.S. there is no religion d'etat, and thus there is no distinction between "recognized" and "unrecognized" authorities. It is quite

the opposite case in Muslim countries. In the U.S., at least in theory, every religion is equally recognized and there is a considerable degree of mutual toleration. In Islamic countries, religious toleration is very limited. The category of "recognized religious minorities" is comprised only of Jews, Christians, and in some cases a few other ancient religions. These minorities are allowed to coexist with the majority, as long as they do not engage in propagation of their religion and do not disobey the restrictions of Muslim law regarding religious minorities. In the process of secularization, some governments have attempted to loosen these restrictions, for example, in Egypt and in Iran under the Pahlevi Shah. Christians, have, to some degree, tried to propagate. That the Muslims do not have an appetite for Christianity and that the attempts of Christian missionaries have not yielded significant results is another issue. Despite secularism, religious fundamentalism has effectively prevented other religions from spreading.

Then there is the other category: the "unrecognized" minorities. Worthy of note is the fate of the post-Muhammadan religions, particularly the most modern ones. (The older ones are virtually extinct, anyway.) Most exemplary are perhaps the Ba'hais in Iran. They are an unrecognized minority and a fairly large one. To add to

their problem, it is the duty of every Bahai to proselytize. During the time of the Shah, one saw many instances of harassment, persecution, and even genocide. Nevertheless, if not officially, they practically enjoyed the ability to exist and grow. But with the rise of the Islamic government, their very existence became a big question. Not only were they not allowed to assemble, but they were branded agents of colonialism, Zionism, and imperialism. Their fate can be compared to that of the Qadianis of Pakistan, who are likewise suffering persecution under the military rule of Zia.

Ironically, the privilege of religious toleration in the U.S. is taken for granted by Muslims. There is virtually no barrier to spreading the faith here, this depending more on the determination of the believers. There are several reasons for converting to Islam, which were exemplified by cases in my study. The most important is, of course, marriage. For a marriage to be valid and permanent, Shi'ite jurisprudence requires both parties to be Muslim. As for temporary marriage (mutah), it makes exception on the female side. She may be of the people of the book, that is, a Jew or Christian, but the children must be Muslim. The Sunni jurisprudence requires that at least the male side must be Muslim, for the only type of marriage it recognizes, i.e. permanent. The second reason for converting is

rebellion against worshipping the "white God". Needless to say, this is the logic by which many black people are attracted to the unpersonified God of Islam. The third reason finds its roots in the rise of the Islamic revolution of Iran and the consequential increased interest in Islam in the West. Although it does not happen frequently, this motivation is characteristic of the conversion of some among the intelligentsia. I know of a professor of Philosophy at T.S.U. (a white man), who has extensively studied Muslim philosophy and considers himself a Muslim, although he has felt no need to go through the formal rite of passage from unbelief to belief. Altogether, in respect to conversion, ISGH is not especially active, except among prison inmates, for whose benefit there is a systematic program. Due to the psychological conditions of black inmates in particular, Islam can and has served as a means to reform. The inmate can receive consolation that his past wrongdoings or due to wrong education and living in a heathen society. And if he is on death row, he can hope that Allah will forgive him and his death may mark a transition to a happy and prosperous life in the paradise of the hereafter, where there is everything the soul desires.

A second element presenting itself is that of "suspicion and paranoia", vis-a-vis the newcomers to the community, particularly if they are active, rather than

vis-a-vis the Christian majority or United States government. By newcomers is not meant the new converts to Islam, who convert for the several reasons described above, but rather the "old" Muslims who suddenly appear on the scene. The cases of Qais al-Kalbi and myself serve as fairly good examples. It is in the middle of the month of Ramadhan that Qais suddenly makes his appearance as a vocal advocate of fundamentalist Islam. There are only a few who rival him in knowledge of Islam, and perhaps none has his eloquence and charisma combined. He may perhaps take someone's job some day. But his strong qualities work against him in terms of relating in the community. On a mild level, he has the potential to incite a small ideological "family feud". At the other extreme, he is an agitator, threatening Muslim unity in ISGH. He speaks against other Muslim sects, namely the Shi'ites. In reality, none of the Sunnis approves of the Shi'ite beliefs; neither do the Shi'ites behave themselves as a minority among the Sunni majority. There are many things each group does that the other doesn't like; yet even if it is superficial, Muslim unity is desired by virtually everyone. Qais is confronted not by the Shi'ite minority, who do not even understand his language, but by his Sunni brothers. Suspicion grows. There are whispers here and there that he may be a spy. People are discouraged from sitting with him

or listening to him. My own case is somewhat less dramatic than his. I lack many of his qualities and in general I could not care less about the dogma of what is right and what is wrong. I was not a missionary, but a student studying the community. Nor was I quite new. Prior to Ramadhan, I had paid several visits to the center, and last Ramadhan (1983) I was a regular attendant. What brought particular attention to me this Ramadhan was my curiosity. I was nosy and thus subject to suspicion. I was able to sense an abrupt change of policy regarding the supply of information by ISGH authorities. I accidentally overheard through a closed door one of the members of the board saying, "Who knows, maybe he is from the CIA." I had been promised ten years of annual reports to establish an indicator of growth in the Islamic Society. I was also supposed to have access to the records of the Society. Thereafter I was politely refused: "We don't keep records." To avoid further suspicion, I stopped asking.

The third important element one should focus on is that of the covert religio-political disputes within the community, despite the overt pretense to unanimity. The differences are there, although they are halted and ignored. One is not supposed to discuss them because of the fragility of the community. The four Sunni sub-sects, Maliqi, Hanafi, Shafai, and Hanbali, are all represented, yet whatever

disputes exist are mild and rarely come to the surface. Shi'ite-Sunni disputes exist are mild and rarely come to the surface. Shi'ite-Sunni disputes occasionally do surface, but they are allowed to re-submerge, thanks to the Shi'ite doctrine of Taqiyah (dissimulation, *reservatio mentalis*): when necessity dictates, the Shi'ite is permitted to hide his faith and pretend to be a Roman among the Romans. Not only this, but also thanks to political awareness and feeling the need for Muslim unity, particularly through the call of religious reformers, from al-Afghani to Khomeini, unity has become a priority. It is not important that a Shi'ite in his heart detests the three first caliphs and Aisha, the youngest widow of Muhammad, or has little faith in Abu Hanifah or Ahmad Hambal. It is enough that he keeps his mouth shut and does not verbalize the attitude of the Shi'ite against the Sunnis. He also does not bring his Muhr to the masjid, this being a piece of dry clay from the grave of a martyr which the Shi'ite use to prostrate on. The Shi'ites regard this as a kind of idol worship. They prostrate merely on the ground or carpet. Shi'ite may prostrate on earth substances, such as dust, stone, wood, and other inedible items, but not on a polyester carpet. But since the Sunnis do not have such limitations, the Shi'ites dissimulate. He says his prayers with open hand instead of crossed upon his chest, but that is a mild

difference. A Shi'ite is permitted to say his prayers behind the Sunni Imam. If he does not judge his prayer behind the Sunni Imam to be proper, he can always repeat it later. As far as the Shi'ite is concerned, it is not important that the Sunnis are not the followers of the right of the family of the prophet of Islam or that their respect for Shi'ite Imams is not distinguished from respect for ordinary mortals. And it is not important that in religious lectures Abu Hurayrah, whom the Shi'ites consider as "hadith fabricator", is constantly quoted, whereas there is no mention of Imam Ja'far al Sadiq. But it is important that the Sunnis call Shi'ites "Muslim brothers". This is sufficient to make the Shi'ite happy for the moment.

The followers of Khomeini (and the majority of the participant Shi'ites are such), in the first stage of revolution, cannot afford to make attempts to solve internal dogmatic disputes. This stage is aimed at establishing a unified Muslim world. No wonder then that Khomeini has a great deal of appeal, even to non-Shi'ites, who share his dream of pan-Islamism. To be clear, the Shi'ites play sheer political games to spread Khomeini's post-revolutionary dogma, calling for unity against the enemies of Islam, which tactics have overruled dogmatic differences. Thanks to the new situation, a Shi'ite and a Sunni no longer sit together to debate the right of Ali or legitimacy of mut'ah, but they

sit together to discuss the glories of Imam Khomeini and his call to overthrow despotic puppets of the unbelievers from their lands. To be clear, one can establish a new division in the community, the political faction versus the nonpolitical faction. The latter still engages in occasional dogmatic disputes; the former have halted dogmatic disputes and are working their way toward a common understanding that Islam is the best system of government, establishment of Islamic government is a must, and attempts to overthrow secular regimes is a religious duty. There is a loose bond connecting all these groups together. Although ISGH is a nonpolitical institution, it is an excellent breeding group for politics, particularly for fundamentalism. Despite the apparent unity, one can make a distinction between various political groups. There are several representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood. There is the small but active following of Imam Khomeini, adjacent to which are the Mujaheddin of Pakistan, who are attempting to overthrow Zia and establish an Islamic government in Pakistan, using Khomeini's model. There are a few Iraqis, none of whom supports Saddam.

Among the current political issues, it seems almost needless to mention the issue of Palestine. There is no doubt among the community that Palestine belongs to Muslims and that the Palestinian issue is a Jewish-Muslim dispute.

"It is the first Muslim grand temple ever taken over by the Jews. They must give it back. The Zionist enemies of Islam do not believe that the Palestinian men and women have human rights too." Thus on the issues of Palestine, everyone is d'accord. Another issue is the occupation of Afghanistan by the Russian infidels. Everyone agrees that this occupation is part of a plot to destroy Islam and establish materialism in a Muslim land. In this regard, the East and West, that is, the Soviet Union and the United States, are united as if in a covert plan. Thus for the members of this community, the division of the world into power blocks is not according to East versus West, but rather believer versus non-believer. ISGH supports the oppressed Muslim people of Afghanistan and helps their cause by all means possible.

The major issue which is not a common ground in the community is that of the Iran-Iraq war. Everyone agrees the main cause of the war is the Americans. It is a catastrophe imposed by the grand Satan upon the Muslims. Many give their support to Khomeini. In their view, it was Saddam of Iraq who instigated the war. Saddam himself has virtually no supporters. Only a few think that the war should continue. The vast majority say it has to stop soon. It has gone too far. A few of these say it should have stopped at the beginning. Some say it has failed to establish the desired Muslim government in Iraq, and therefore it has to

be stopped. The ones who support the continuation of the war beg the others to be patient. Since the beginning of the war, they have every week reported the glad tidings that Saddam is falling.

A fourth element to be observed is that of resistance to change. Bid'ah (innovation) has a bad connotation. It represents corruption in religion. Sunnah (tradition of the prophet), needless to say, bears favorable connotations. Sunnah and bid'ah are two opposites, very much like good and evil. A typical Muslim regards the whole of western civilization as an evil being. Rarely does one speak of its scientific, philosophical, or cultural progress. Western civilization is depicted as wine, promiscuity, gambling, and godlessness. The issues of the "cover" for women, forbidden foods, and alcohol are constantly in the Muslim mind.

The common Muslim argument as it concerns cover is that a woman without adequate cover is satanically and sexually attractive to man. She leads man astray from the ways from the ways of God. Nudity is defined as lack of proper and sufficient cover. A woman's hair, skin of the neck, leg, and arm, and even the outline of her torso, once revealed, are defined as promiscuity. There is a total lack of comprehension that modesty can be culturally defined or that what is termed as promiscuity is not such at all, but merely a different way of covering oneself. A Muslim refuses to

believe in the existence of naked tribes living as honorable societies in different corners of the world. What does not fit Muslim jurisprudence is virtually, if not absolutely, wrong. Some of the arguments, not of the men, but of women, make a good deal of sense: that woman in the West has been stripped of her womanhood. She is a consumer of cosmetics and fashion and she is a tool of commercialization, rather than being a woman. A Muslim woman refuses to follow their path.

The issue of women and innovation goes beyond cover. The main issue is indeed the social status of women. There is a constant systematic effort to put women "in their proper place", that is, to push them outside man's territory. This can be observed on both the actual and the symbolic level. On the actual level, note that no woman has ever served as a member of the board or in any other important function. True that some of them have sometimes served as instructors of children or women, but they in no way comprise a status in the upper echelon of the pyramid of authority. In Islam, a woman cannot lead the prayer unless all participants are female. She cannot be a judge, and indeed as Qais indicates, women should not interfere in social or political affairs. Discussions about women, and particularly their participation in the masjid, reflect an attitude of hostility. They are considered trouble and an

obstacle in the way of the performance of rituals. This is particularly true in the case of a woman with some exceptional beauty and especially without adequate cover. This in no way means that women are completely giving in to the demands of the male chauvinist Muslims. Direct contact with them (Hitaji being an exception) was a no-no. But I was able to observe some exceptional women who were somewhat aggressive for their rights, invading male territory. I will never forget when we were trying to set up the women's tent and a little wisp of a Pakistani woman approached us, advised us, and then picked up a hammer and nails and accomplished what four men had been struggling to do for an hour. A few times a lady with "inadequate cover" (mascara, lipstick, tight and short dress, panty-hose, and exposed hair on the side of her head) sat with the men to break her fast. This was bothersome, but no one dared to utter a word to her directly, for her brother was with her.

On the symbolic level, one is to note that at the time of prayer, women stand behind the men and boys at some distance. As a Muslim woman once pointed out to me, "We women have all the joy. We see men's rear ends in tight pants, while they cannot see ours." Again note that while men have a permanent shelter to pass time and socialize in, women have a temporary tent set up by the men. This symbolizes the temporary social status of women in the

Muslim world -- their invasion of male territory can at any moment be blown away by the wind. There is constant advice that women with children should not come to the masjid. "Their children run around and distract the worshipers. They should keep their children at home." Despite these facts, every time women's feelings or integrity are injured, there are some conciliatory words. Note for example that Qais's chauvinistic lecture is followed by another talk on the status and rights of the mother. "If someone's mother is not pleased with him, he will go to hell." All present realized that his second lecture was merely patronizing. He reminded the women that the rights of motherhood come immediately after the right of God, at least on an abstract level. This is at least an attempt to placate them. For more detail on this important element, contrast the arguments of Hitaji Abdul Aziz (appendix A) and Qais al-Kalbi (appendix B). Hitaji represents to a considerable degree the dissatisfied intellectual woman who is constantly being pushed back to her "proper place". Qais represents he who pushes. He is a typical fundamentalist Muslim who does not wish to see his world corrupted by the dislocation of women out of their proper social status.

Another point in the issue of bid'ah concerns diet. Muslims, as it is known, do not consume pork. They regard swine and dog as the filthiest of animals. The Muslim

animal diet is fairly restricted. It is somewhat similar to the Jewish laws for Kosher diet. The animals whose flesh is deemed edible in Islam must be slaughtered in accordance with proper procedures. Otherwise, their flesh is not touchable or edible. Every Muslim grocery store features Hallal meat and sells none other.

Alcohol also is a big issue. Muslim argument vis-a-vis American alcoholism makes much sense. It was by accident that I was able to witness the appearance on the premises of the masjid, during the month of Ramadhan, of a Muslim who was quite drunk and who caused a great stir among the pious members. His presence there was in no way an encouragement for the young Muslims to begin drinking. On the contrary, his intoxicated behavior strengthened the Muslim belief in the evils of alcohol, the very mother of degeneracy. To make the argument brief, cover, alcohol, and meat are generally unifying issues in the community, particularly among those who hold authority or have influence.

Besides being a center of assembly for the believers, one is to consider ISGH as a quasi-bureaucratic institution for religio-political pragmatism, rather than just belief. Note for example, the nature of marriages which take place between Muslims and new converts. With no exception, the fear of the Iranian clients was whether the Islamic Republic of Iran would acknowledge the validity of the marriage and

whether the family "back home" would approve of such a marriage. The fear of the Islamic Republic was genuine and deep for all those who planned to return there somewhere in the foreseeable future. Marriage in non-Muslim institutions by a non-Muslim clergyman or judge is void. They may be husband and wife on paper, but they continue to be living in sin as far as traditional Muslims are concerned. Their children, if they have any, are "illegitimate". The fear is even stronger for a Muslim woman who marries a non-Muslim man. In no circumstances whatsoever can such a marriage be Islamically valid, regardless of whether he is of the people of the Book or not. The only solution is for him to convert before the marriage, and so they do, if there is any intention of ever returning to the women's home. Note that this kind of marriage has family considerations as well. The parents on the Muslim side, who belong to the previous generation, the brothers and sisters whose religious sentiments have been reawakened by the Iranian revolution, and the rest of the family who have never known western society, are not likely to be as the client is. Many would prefer not to have an infidel join their family. But conversion, even if only in appearance, turns this situation around. The Muslim not only marries, but he or she adds a new member to the Muslim community.

Another bureaucratic function of ISGH makes its

appearance at the time of someone's death. Even if one is not a regular attendant of ISGH, after death someone can call the authorities and they will arrange everything. They have to do so. The funeral rite is al-Wajib al-Kifai. Let me explain: the term refers to public obligation. When a Muslim hears that another Muslim has died, it is his duty to perform the complete rites of passage. If he tells others, the rite becomes a collective duty. If one person in the community volunteers for their job, the burden is taken off the other's shoulders. Fortunately, as far as I know, no death occurred during Ramadhan in the community.

Thus one can conclude that ISGH plays four important functions: First, it is the place of worship, a house of God in the land of unbelief. In the midst of irreligiousness, a Muslim can quench his spiritual thirst by going to its oasis.

The second function is that of a central focus for a community, with a sense of belonging to a Muslim establishment with connections all over the world, yet free and independent from any externally imposed temporal power. One can experience at least a limited freedom in one's own community, as well as experiencing the helpless struggles and disputes which have to go on in it.

Third is the bureaucratic function through which people can find solutions to difficult or even "impossible"

questions. Marriage of a non-Muslim male to a Muslim female is technically impossible, but if the male party is willing to play Muslim for a few minutes and utter words of witness, he is technically a Muslim. And once the papers are signed, he may go back to living as before if he so wishes. A funeral is costly in the U.S. if one does not believe in treating the dead like garbage to be disposed of or burned up. A dead Muslim has as much honor and dignity as a live one, if not more so. Muslims respect their dead. Thus for the rites of passage, particularly on the bureaucratic level, ISGH can be a wonderful and even miraculous institution.

And last but not least, ISGH is a remarkable breeding ground for Islamic fundamentalism. This function by far surpasses all the other functions in arousing our curiosity. It arises mainly out of the fact that Islam is not merely a religion, but is a complete way of life. ISGH provides Islamic education for both children and adults, including Sunday school for both as well. It has a library of some 3,000 books in English, Arabic, and Urdu, which members may use. Free Islamic literature is distributed. Everything goes very well on these accounts. True, there is not unanimity as to what shape Islamic government could or should have, but there is complete agreement that Islam is the best way of life and provides the best of governments.

Ramadhan 1

It is 10:30 a.m., the first day of Ramadhan, 1404 A.H., Friday, June 1, 1984. It is accidental that the beginning of the solar Christian month and the lunar Islamic month have coincided. Last night and the previous night, many devout Muslims were on the roofs and above tall buildings, in search of the moon in the cloudy skies of Houston, some even with modern telescopes. It was however certain that Friday would be the first of the month of Ramadhan.¹ For the next 29 days, Muslims the world over will be observing the ritual fast and focussing on religious activities. The lunar month of Ramadhan is a blessed and sacred period for Muslims. The Quran was revealed in this month,² on the night of Qadr (power). "The night of Qadr is better than a thousand months.'

We have just arrived on the premises of the Islamic Society of Greater Houston at 3110 Eastside. My field assistant, 'Hassan," who is daily becoming more familiar with beliefs and practices of Islam, has decided to observe the fast of Ramadhan for the first time. The building appears abandoned, so we first measure the property (47 paces by 100 paces). All doors are locked, with burglar bars, and the parking lot is empty. Soon someone appears briefly and leaves. He seems to be an electrician or maintenance man. There are fliers and signs, both

commercial and noncommercial, on bulletin boards on both sides and the back of the building. They are in three languages: English, Arabic, and Urdu. One sign on the door to the Masjid asks us in English to pray for "Muslim brothers" fighting in Lebanon. Another announces in Arabic that there will be a guest lecturer from Egypt. He is supposed to be a mujahid (a holy warrior). He will stay for three days. A grocer has placed ads in all three languages, offering items such as Islamically prepared meat at a reasonable price. A Muslim jeweller has a pictorial ad enticing potential customers to buy jewelry with Muslim designs. There is a short critique in Arabic of a book recently published concerning Islam. There are also ads for several garage sales, baby sitters, roommates, etc.

A man parks his car and approaches us. He is a Pakistani with a well-trimmed beard and is well-dressed according to the Muslim code of dressing. I recognize him as Abdalrahim Buzdar, a serious member of ISGH, and a friend with whom I have spoken on many occasions. We shake hands and, before I say anything, he unlocks the iron gates into the breezeway, and leads us to his office. The phone is ringing, and he points to a model for the new Islamic center and masjid (mosque), supposed to replace the present facilities in which we stand. The phone rings again, and I peruse the model and an album of information, diagrams, and

illustrations of the proposed building plans. This album, along with some information from Mr. Buzdar, reveal much of the history of ISGH:

Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, a cancer expert, a longtime Muslim activist, formerly the representative of Khomeini in the U.S. and Canada, the interpreter of Khomeini in Paris, the minister of foreign affairs in engineer Mehdi Bazargan's cabinet,⁴ and presently a member of parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran, helped to organize the society in 1968, first meeting in private homes in the community. In 1971 they obtained a building on Richmond Ave. near Woodhead, which had previously been a Christian church, with a mortgage which was immediately liquidated through private donations and loans. The dogmatic reason is the unorthodox nature of a bank loan, which requires interest from the client. Usury is forbidden in Islam.⁵ As the number of members increased, the Richmond site proved insufficient, particularly for Friday prayer. In 1981 the property on Eastside was purchased and this expansion was further amended by the establishment of two satellite centers which offer public prayer five times a day, Dar al-Salam on Bellaire Blvd, presided over by Imam Khurshid, and the other on Greens Rd. at North Freeway. The Richmond site now serves as a dormitory, and there is a suggestion to establish an Islamic library there.

Between telephone calls, I ask Mr. Buzdar for a breakdown of the present membership. He says the total membership is over 1000 with regular attendance of 200 on Sundays and 400-500 for Friday prayer. Some occasionally come from the satellites, and more attend when the Saudi Educational Mission is closed. He says the constituency is approximately fifty percent Arab and fifty percent "Ajam" (non-Arab). The Masjid is generally open from 11 a.m. until 11 or 12 at night. Ideally it should be open from about 4 a.m., but as Mr. Buzdar apologetically explains, "We are only human here." So they seek more volunteers in order to function to full capacity. The Masjid usually closes between each of the five prayers. Mr. Buzdar exhibits a very positive and conciliatory, if not idealistic, approach to the community. "It is good that people can come here with their differences and work them out." He also replies to a question from my assistant, "We have no Sunnis and Shi'ites here, only Muslims."⁶ The album in my hands lists three main purposes of ISGH:

1. to preserve Muslim identity by providing Islamic education
2. to protect the faith of Muslim children and prepare them to face the challenge of change
3. to remove the misunderstandings of non-Muslim Americans about Islam and Muslims and invite them to

understand the eternal message of Allah

More specific details are outlined in a copy of the Constitution and By-laws. This document is divided into eleven articles describing the structure and function of ISGH in some detail. Article I designates the name and location of the corporation. Article II describes purposes of ISGH as a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization. ISGH is to provide religious and social services to all Muslims, acting as a bridge between them and the Houston community in general (sec. 1. It will propagate Islam and train its members accordingly (sec. 3,4). Article III deals with membership, which falls into several categories. Any Muslim in Houston is considered a natural member. An associate member can include anyone, regardless of religion, who wishes to join and pay dues or shows interest. To be a member of the General Assembly, a person must a) be a Muslim, b) file an application, c) be at least 15 years old,⁷ d) pay his dues, e) attend regular Sunday meetings for at least six months, and f) be endorsed by two members. Membership may be revoked for missing four Sunday meetings without due cause, or by a three-fourth vote of the membership committee. Article IV describes meetings. The annual meeting is held in December and the members elect the president and board members. Special meetings may be called

when needed. A quorum consists of one-third of the membership. Article V explains that the Board of Directors will serve two year terms on an alternating basis, and each director must have been a member of ISGH for one year. Four members must be citizens or permanent residents of the U.S., but four may hold other types of visas. Article VI deals with the officers. The president must be a citizen or permanent resident and a member in good standing for " at least two years. His term of office is two years. He presides over the board and the general assembly, as well as being general manager of ISGH. The other eight offices are also described. They are appointed from the board by the president, except for the vice president, who is selected by the board, and who must have the same qualifications as the president. The other officers serve one year terms. There is a General Secretary and a Secretary of Finances. The Secretary of Religious Affairs is in charge of Sunday meetings, all religious meetings and celebrations, the library and book service, marriages and funerals. The Secretary of Social Affairs is supposed to help provide "an Islamic Social atmosphere." The Secretary of Membership keeps a roster and assists in cases of default. The Secretary of Publications and Public Relations is involved with the Voice of Islam among other duties. The Secretary of Allah is involved in promulgation of Islam, including the

visiting of prison inmates. Each of these secretaries may appoint from three to five persons as Coordinating Committee for helping fulfill his duties. Article VII designates dues, ranging from \$4 to \$10 annually. Article VIII describes the seal of ISGH and the fiscal term, as well as detailed requirements of real estate transactions. Article IX describes the policy toward use of its funds for other than authorized purposes. "No substantial part of the activities of the ISGH shall be the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempts to influence legislation, and the ISGH shall not participate in... any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office." Article X describes the terms of dissolution, that the recipient must be a nonprofit organization. Article XI designates the requirements for amending the constitution by two-thirds vote of a quorum of the General Assembly. So far nothing has been amended or added.

The present board of directors consists of the following nine men:

President: Said Jum'ah; engineer; Egypt.

Vice president: Said Ahmad; engineer, Pakistan.

General Secretary: Said Mir Hassan; engineer; Pakistan.

Secretary of Finances: Said Amanullah; C.P.A.; Pakistan.

Secretary of Religious Affairs: Faruq Malik;

accountant; Pakistan.

Secretary of Social Affair: Shafiq Helmi; civil engineer; Egypt.

Secretary of Membership: Tahir Assafi; businessman; Iraq.

Secretary of Publications and Public Relations: Abdalrahim Buzdar; engineer; Pakistan.

Secretary of Propagation: Zafar Quraishi; geo-physicist; Pakistan.

The facilities on Eastside have proved inadequate for the surge of attendance, and thus plans for a new, improved, customized masjid and Islamic center, featuring Islamic architecture with dome and minarets, are currently proposed. The plans call for an enlarged assembly hall, meeting hall and open "supporting functions," including office space, court, as well as classrooms, the Imam's apartment, toilets, underground parking, etc. The total gross area proposed is 96629 sq. ft. and the estimated construction cost is \$5,175,000. (For more details, see appendix).

As Mr. Buzdar answers the incessantly ringing phone, two men and one woman enter the office. They comprise a brother and sister from Iran and an Anglo-American, the intended future husband of the Iranian lady. Buzdar is too busy to speak with them right away because of having to answer many similar questions on the phone : "Yes, today is

the first day of Ramadhan....Imsak is at 4:54 a.m., Iftar at 8:19 p.m....'' I begin a conversation with the three clients. The American desires to become a Muslim in order that he can marry the woman. I provide some information, and as Buzdar gets off the phone, I summarize the problem for him. He confirms that the man should first convert in front of Muslim witnesses, then they should go to the court for a legal marriage and return to the masjid for a Muslim marriage. The brother wants to be sure all the legal procedures are in order. His concern is not the American courts, but rather the legal institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He wants to consult a member of M.S.A.P.S.G., that is, one of the followers of Khomeini, so that the conversion and marriage are formally acknowledged by Iranian authorities. He asks me in Farsi, "Is it okay that they are Sunnis? Does Khomeini recognize this institution as Islamic?" I answer affirmatively. The Sunnis even surpass the Shi'ite requirements for the validity of marriage, namely, having two male witnesses. The Shi'ites require no witnesses in this case. In my view, the brother and sister do not look or behave as "true Muslims." He is very chic, well-shaved, and with his shirt buttons partly opened. She seems to feel slightly uncomfortable wearing the required headdress, thick hose, and relatively long dress. One can tell she has just washed

off her makeup to look proper when confronting Muslim authorities. Jokingly, and somewhat mischievously I quip, "becoming a Muslim is easy. Give me a sharp knife and I'll.." The potential convert does not hear, "perform the circumcision", but the lady turns white; her eyes are asking me if it is a serious issue. I remember a year ago, when a Chinese lady decided to marry an Iranian friend of mine, her friends told her that she had to be circumcised as a part of rite du passage.¹¹

Someone enters and requests that the masjid be opened so he can recite the Quran. Buzdar opens it. An Iraqi Muslim, Tahir Assafi, another active member, enters and greets everyone, but reveals anger over some issue. He shows me an editorial cartoon clipped from The Houston Post, showing Khomeini and the Iraqis and a westerner commenting, "Well at least they have not so far spilled any oil...just blood." I do not understand, and it is not the proper context to ask, whether he is angry at the "Jewish media," at Khomeini, at Saddam, or at the very paradox of the Iran-Iraq war itself. But he is furious. The time of the noon prayer is approaching and I have to leave.

*Friday Prayer, Ramadhan 1

At about 1:00 the crowd starts pouring in. There is a mild competition to occupy places closest to the pulpit, where the Imam is supposed to stand for the sermons. By

1:30 there is no room to swing a cat. The latecomers have no choice but to sit outside the masjid in the courtyard and parking lots. On two sides of the crowd there are long tables covered with literature from the Islamic Republic of Iran. They are in three languages, English, Farsi, and Arabic. The hot issue is of course the desired spill over of the Islamic revolution to other Muslim lands. The Iranian revolution does not seem to be a perfect example to be followed, yet the fever of revolution has not even dwindled at all. The citizens of other Muslim lands at least go as far as condemnation of their respective governments, who are sometimes referred to as agents of Satan, Zionism, Imperialism, Kufr (disbelief, or at least serving non-divine purposes. Yet some pass the tables of revolution with disdain. The sub-issue of the day is the Iran/Iraq war, and of course, condemnation of Iraq, not only as the instigator of the war, but also as a tool in the hands of enemies of Islam. The cover of a recent issue of the English language magazine, Echo of Islam shows a young boy, a middle-aged woman, and a man burned as a result of chemical warfare, for which Iraq was criticized in the world press. Inside the cover is a picture of S. Muhammad Baqhir Sadr, a top Shi'ite clergyman allegedly martyred with his sister at the hands of Saddam of Iraq. He was representative of Khomeini in Iraq and was supposed to begin a similar revolution inside Iraq.

In the picture Sadr is holding the green flag of Islam, which bears the Quranic words, "Triumph from Allah and a near victory." Some of the topics are "Morocco: Fire under Ash", "International Conference on Islamic Ideology"; "Muhammad in the Bible"; "Women of Islam"; "Tudeh Martyr"; "Chemical Scourge"; "Synopsis of Chemical Warfare"; "Cultural Revolution: 900 Days in Baghdad". . . An Arabic pamphlet, written by a well known Iranian clergyman, S. Hadi Khosrowshahi, explains " Why we don't accept the peace plans." Another English magazine, Horizons, provides the information that Dr. Hossein al-Shahristani, an Iraqi nuclear physicist in the custody of Saddam, is in danger of execution. Of course there are the English versions of the two state-controlled Iranian newspapers. A booklet speaks of Iranian self-sufficient technology to build a military bridge. It also provides indexes of the services that the new regime of Iran has provided its people. There is also the eye-catching horush, featuring bold graphics and slick layout, and all this information is free. One is reminded of the apostles who say "I do not ask you for any reward." 2

The pro-Khomeini propagandists stand behind the tables, like persistent bold-sellers, calling their Muslim "brothers" to come and get the latest news on the Iran/Iraq war. There are no women among them. One can only suppose that the women are elsewhere carrying on a similar mission

among their non-Iranian "sisters." One cannot avoid noticing the segregation of men and women in Muslim communities, particularly at the time of prayer. At the beginning of Islam, such segregation at the time of prayer did not exist. Men and women stood shoulder to shoulder for prayer. But this was only temporarily because of danger from non-Muslims. According to a reliable source, such "egalitarianism" was once again temporarily revived by Khomeini in Paris. "I told the Imam, this is not fair. Men stand behind you protected in the tent. We women, whose protection in the land of unbelief is more necessary, have to stand outside, behind the tent." The Imam replied, "Now the time is like that of the beginning of Islam. You can stand shoulder to shoulder with your brothers."² Unlike in ordinary religious gatherings, during the Hajj pilgrimage, men and women mix. Is it possible that only at the beginning of Islamic revolutions, whether they be the original revolution of Muhammad, the anti-colonial revolution in Algeria, the constitutional revolution of Iran, the recent Islamic revolution of Iran, and the yearly symbolic revolution of Hajj -- a microcosm of the day of resurrection -- men and women reach the point of equality? There are even glimpses of women seeking equality in Quran,¹³ which God forbids. After the battle of Karbala, it is Hussein's sister, Zainab, who at least temporarily

carries on the message of Hussein. In the Algerian revolution, there are heroines, to name one, Jamila Bupasha. In the constitutional revolution of Iran, women have a pioneering role.¹⁴ It is they who demonstrate and pull their husbands out of the homes by suggesting to them that were they not ready to carry the manly task, they should wear the veil and stay in the kitchen. In the recent Iranian revolution, women, in the words of Ayatollah Taleqani, held their nursing babies on their breasts and confronted the machine guns.¹⁵

One difficulty for the field worker is that he is morally not even allowed to look at a crowd of females, lest he confront the bitter criticism of a fanatical brother, flatly charging one with lustful intentions. At about 1:30, the ceremony begins.

Friday prayer is well known for its political nature. I have participated in Friday prayers in the Iranian cities of Mashad and Yazd. The ceremony in Houston fairly much reminds me of the same procedure. Friday prayer is comprised of two units (raka which technically replace the four units of Zuhur noon). Preceding the Friday prayer are two sermons that the audience is required to listen to in silence. The subject of the prayer is usually either the daily problems of people or a description of the moral principles of Islam. The orthodox Sunnis believe Friday

prayer to be required. Among the minority Shi'ites, there is a dispute: a handful of Shi'ite scholars have determined it to be Wajib (required, an example being the late Haji Agha Rahim Arbab of Isfahan, in the twentieth century, who is reported to have held Friday prayer in his own house, due to the small number of his followers; most consider it to be Mustahab (recommended but optional); and some have even said it is Lara (forbidden). The reason for this dispute is the uncertainty connected with the Quran, which appears to require it, and the critical nature of the period of the osculation of Mahdi. Since, in the sermons of Friday, the name of the supreme authority, namely the Imam of the time, is to be mentioned, and since the Shi'ites have throughout time considered any political authority, whether the caliphate or sultanate, as non-divine and usurping,¹⁶ the ulama have taken their various stands. Friday prayer has historically been manipulated by the caliphs, particularly the Abassids, who required their subservient, provincial governors to mention the name of the caliph in each sermon as a sign of loyalty to the central authority. The example of Tahir Zul Yaminain comes to mind. As the governor of Khurasan, appointed by caliph al-Mahmun (ruled 813-833 A.D., the Friday before his suspicious death in 842, he mentioned his own name instead of that of the caliph, indicating his breach of loyalty to the caliph and thus symbolically

declaring the independence of Iran from Arab rule. During the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties, the Imam of the Friday prayer was normally a government appointee. There were, however, a few exceptions, who nevertheless had the permission of the government.

In the Iranian city of Yazd Friday prayer was revived in the twentieth century by a well-known religious leader, S.A. Vazi. Prior to this revival, in this traditional city, Friday prayer was not a big deal. As an excellent orator, Vaziri made Friday prayer a major weekly event, not only in Yazd, but also in Kerman and Zahedan. Traditionally the sermonist stands on the pulpit, but in other occasions he sits. In Friday prayer he holds a weapon in his hands, a sword, spear, or at least a long metal wand, the symbol of his authority, and he speaks in a commanding tone of voice.

Before the Iranian revolution, many Iranians had never once participated in Friday prayer. Politics made it an effective medium for the Islamic Republic. Then the Im Juma' (leader of the congregation) ascended the pulpit, bearing a German rifle in his hands. Ayatollah Taleqani, who held this position until his sudden death, always gathered a great crowd. In his last sermon, he bitterly criticized the selfish authorities who were moving toward dictatorial rule. Taleqani died and he was replaced by some other clergymen who unconditionally favored the republic.

The crowds dwindled after Taleqani's death, but the prayer nevertheless remains a weekly political occasion.

In Houston the sermonist does not hold the traditional weapon. He simply stands, and there is not much politics in the sermon. The only difference today is the size of the crowd, as this Friday corresponds with the first day of Ramadhan. Once before, when the masjid was still on Richmond, I had participated in such an event, when Adiq al Mahdi, the grandson of the famous Mahdi of Sudan, was in charge of the sermon. Despite the fact that he holds a Ph.D. in political science, he did not speak of politics, with the exception of a reference to the need for Muslim unity. He did, however, hold a Muslim conference at the University of Houston, where he discussed the Iranian revolution and pledged support for Khomeini's regime.

Friday Night, Ramadhan 1

Friday night, after the Maghrib prayer, the crowd stampedes to the tables of food: rice, beef stew, chicken, cantaloupe, watermelon, and of course, plenty of Coca-Cola. At a time when Red China is also an avid consumer of such western products, is it so inappropriate that there is a Coke machine and a large stock of it in the storage of ISGH? The Muslims are so hungry to break their fast that no one seemed too concerned about the quality of the food. After all, what is the philosophy behind fasting? That one goes

hungry in order to feel himself in the shoes of the starving poor and that one tests his determination to go 16 hours without the habitual refill of food, drink, or even a little drag on a cigarette?¹⁸ One cannot help but be amazed by the quick service here. In a matter of minutes, everyone is served food. In a matter of minutes, the tables are cleared and wiped. And in a few minutes more, all the tables and chairs are folded and put into storage, the ground swept, and everyone is ready to say Isha prayer.

After the Isha prayer, many people leave, but many stay to participate in the traditional Tarawih prayer. The minority Shi'ites do not practice Tarawih. They consider it an abrogated tradition (and therefore Ataram, which the second caliph, Umar, reinstated, under the advice of the suspicious Tamim al Dari.¹⁹ Following Tarawih there is supposed to be a recitation of the Quoran, for the purpose of which an expert has been invited from Egypt. Shaikh Barakat is a tall, dark, and handsome man with a beautiful voice for reciting. He is dressed in the garb of an Egyptian Mufti: finah, amammah, long cloak and yet he is ironically well shaven. Everyone seems to love him and enjoy his wittiness in criticizing his pupils' recitation. His bon mot is the following poem from Ali ibn Abi-Talib:

The one who obtains knowledge orally from a master,
He is protected against misguidance and misreading;

But the one who obtains knowledge from written text,
His knowledge in the view of the knowledgeable is null.

Tonight there is a slight change in the schedule. A "holy warrior" scholar has been invited by the Organization of Muslim Youth to speak on Islam: Shaikh Ahmad al-Mahlawi. Everyone seems eager for his ascendance to the pulpit. Suddenly a tall, stocky Anglo-American man, accompanied by two darker men, comes forward. One of the dark men whispers something in the ear of the president of ISGH, who is sitting in the front row. He stands, as if victoriously, and faces the crowd, microphone in hand, "Brothers and sisters, I have an important announcement to make. Robert (signifying the light-skinned man) has decided after study that Islam is the true religion. He has come here tonight to embrace Islam." The two companions are his two witnesses. "Please, brother Robert, repeat after me. "I witness that there is no deity but Allah. I witness that Muhammad is the apostle of God." Robert is asked to repeat the words six times, three in Arabic, and three in English. There comes a loud shout from the middle of the crowd, Ollah-u-Okbar. (God is Supreme). The crowd chants this several times. The president turns to Robert and continues, delivering a short sermon containing all the major principles, beliefs, and practices of Islam. Robert and his company return their places.

Mahalawi ascends the pulpit and lectures in classical Arabic, so that everyone acquainted with the language of Quran should understand. The essence of his speech is: "Revive your religion if you desire to enjoy the glory of the early Muslims." Shakir, an Egyptian and staunch follower of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, has taken notes. After Mahalawi finishes, he translates the entire speech into English. His translating skill is amazing. At about midnight the crowd disperses. Nasser, a tall, stocky Egyptian, rushes to me and asks, "Do you know of Mahalawi?" "No, who is he? He seems to be a very fine speaker." Nasser replies, "After the assassination of Sadat, he was arrested and put in jail, where he delivered a sermon behind the bars." I ask, "Is he the assassin?" "No, he started the movement." By this time many people are crowded around Mahalawi, shaking his hand. Nasser jumps to shake his hand and guides my hands toward him, whispering in my ear, "Hurry and shake his hand before it is too late." I do and Mahalawi looks straight into my eyes, as if attesting to his sacredness. He is very tall and I look up at him.

By this time I see another clergyman who is also engaged in shaking peoples hands.²⁰ Shaikh Barakat, the expert of recitation, has delayed shaking hands with Mahalawi. There are several people around him who seem to be encouraging him for the contact. Finally there is a

formal, somewhat cold hand-shake. "You blessed us," said Barakat. Mahalawi utters some complementary words. I become very curious and follow Barakat outside the masjid, where he sits at a table with several Egyptians. He criticizes Mahalawi, though not by name, for his move in Egypt. Repeatedly he says, "Such is not in accordance with the manner of our apostle. Blood brings more blood. We may be experts of religion, but not of modern politics. Politics should be left to the politicians" A minor debate ensues, but Barakat seems to emerge persuasive. He speaks of the new "underground" in Cairo, ironically referring to the subway, and says, "One should look into the excellent underground that connects the different segments of Cairo together." A youth asks Barakat in a somewhat joking tone why he had not become a singer, rather than a reciter. "Maybe he can't dance like Michael Jackson," someone says, drawing laughter from some. Barakat tells a story concerning the overcoming of temptation.

Saturday, Ramadhan 2

By 3: 00 p.m., Buzdar is running around taking care of ten jobs at once. The tent they had set up for the women has been blown down by the wind. He has to set it back up. A couple has come to register their marriage. The telephone is ringing. The courtyard has to be swept before tables and chairs can be set up. Two light bulbs which had illuminated

the women's tent, now blown down, were either stolen or borrowed the night before. I find this an unreasonable time to ask him to sit down for a leisurely interview. Instead I pick up the hammer and nails and help set the tent back up. Buzdar is running and sweating while murmuring verses of the Quran and prayers between his lips. The tent is extremely beautiful, made in Pakistan, with many elaborate designs on it. As its walls, we have to use old blankets and nail them to the bars. There are not enough blankets, so a blackboard is used to make this a secure place for women and save their chastity from the potential lusting eye. Instead of two bulbs, I install three. Budzar thanks me.

The couple who have come to Islamicize their marriage are still waiting. The man, Ali, is an engineer from Isfahan, Iran. He is a Muslim. The wife, Suzanne, is a Christian American. Sever years previous, they got married in Alief, Texas. A Christian priest performed the marriage. They have no children, perhaps because, with a Christian marriage, their children would be considered illegitimate. Now they have decided that their marriage should be acknowledged by a Muslim institution. It is perhaps time to have a legitimate kid. Buzdar asks the woman to fill in a formal marriage contract, so there would not be misspelling. This is after the Shaikh had uttered the formula for marriage. In Islam a Christian or Jewish man cannot have a

Muslim wife, but a Christian or Jewish woman may have a Muslim husband. This is due to the patrilineal rule in Muslim tradition, that the children are counted as belonging to their father. Suzanne does not have to convert. I ask her, "How are you going to raise your children, as Muslim or Christian?" She answers, "We are going to teach them the good points of both traditions." They donate \$50 to the masjid and leave. There is another marriage contract on the desk: Mahmud and Mary Kay. On the average, someone embraces Islam once every three days in this masjid. The majority of these are those who want to marry a Muslim. According to one informant, they are mostly men; according to another they are mostly women. There are several instances in which a couple have converted together. The majority of newcomers are of American origin.

From among the black American Muslims, three groups can be distinguished. The Bilalians are centered in another masjid on Moonmist Street, where Hafiz Iqbal is Imam. There are "Black Muslims", as they are popularly called, or members of the American Muslim Mission, which they and their polite friends call them. They follow Wallace D. Muhammad, son of Elijah Muhammad. Their mosque is on Bellfort Drive, where Abdul Qadir Kamalluddin is Imam. They seem to have little association with ISGH. The third group mixes with their other Muslim brothers and many are regular attendants

of this masjid. Fortunately, Muslims seem to be, at least theoretically, color blind when it comes to race.

While still working on the tent, an informant tells me that Mahalawi has cancelled this program in the masjid due to insufficient attendance. There is a look of despair on the faces of those helping with the tent. "They changed the time," someone says, "and that ruined the whole thing. People are too lazy to attend a lecture in the afternoon." A Pakistani man comments, "It is a pity that such a great scholar comes so long a distance to guide us onto the straight path, but people do not come." His mind seems to make a leap to another place. "The Iranians were lucky to have such a divine revolution. It was an act of God. It was strictly and only by the will of Allah that they succeeded. We need such a revolution in the entire Islamic world." I question him, "But don't you think there is political repression in Iran, even more than what it was before?" He answers, "I don't know, brother, but I think, for Islam, one is justified to sacrifice everything." Persuaded by his logic, I bring up the issue of Pakistan and the repressive regime of Zia Ulhaq, the military president of that country. He said, "Zia is not perfect, but he is good. Look at the other alternative, the corrupted Bhutto family. Poor Zia, every time he wants to hold an election, they agitate and he has to postpone it." Buzdar wipes the

sweat from his brow and interjects, "We are Muslims, the worshipers of Allah, praise be unto him. A Muslim should not worship any hero. It is a kind of relative idol worship. I wish our Iranian brethren would not emphasize so much on Imam Khomeini." Then, with closed eyes, he recites a verse from Quran: "Oh prophet, fear God."²¹ This is the way God speaks to the one for whose sake heaven and earth were created." His eyes are open and the tears drip.

After Maghib prayer, Abdurrahman, an ex-secretary of ISGH (recently fired) sells cassettes of Mahalawi's speech; many buy it. If the politics of ISBH does not allow an appropriate opportunity for the "holy warrior", one can at least make his voice available by cassette.

Sunday Night, Ramadhan 10

The Tarawih prayer has ended and people are going home, except for a handful who remain in the masjid to receive instruction on how to recite the Quran. A black man grabs the microphone and begins to shout in terse, rhythmic phrases resembling either a machine gun or a modern rap singer, criticizing Muslims for wearing western shirts and trousers and coming to the masjid bareheaded. "Listen my brothers, Let's return to our tradition. Why not wear Islamic garb and put on sacred turbans? The reason I don't wear one is I don't have one to wear. If I had one, I would put it on. You should do hat too. There is nothing to be

ashamed of in the Muslim code of dressing. There is nothing shameful about a turban. Let's wear it brothers." No one seems to take him seriously. I sit down, reflecting on the history of Hijab (headcover) in Muslim countries, that before westernization, men wore turbans, kifyahs, and eastern style hats. For example in Iran, before the reign of Reza Shah, the majority of Iranian men and women wore what today is called the "Islamic code of dressing." In particular, they would not appear in public bare headed. Reza Shah forced "unveiling," not only on Iranian women, but also on Iranian men. Didn't he replace their turbans with Pahlavi hats? Didn't the Pahlavi hats disappear in order to be replaced by a shock of hair which used to be shaved. In this respect, men accepted the change: a few went back to their tradition after the departure of Reza Shah. Women, with a few exceptions, went back to the traditional chador (veil).

I am awakened from my pondering by two Iranian men, Abbas and Mehdi, both cab drivers ²² who approach me and ask me to teach them to read Quran. I agree and we proceed immediately. As we begin, Imam Kamaluddin sits down with us in the courtyard to listen to us. We exchange complements. He leaves after a while. Behind me sit three Iranians engaged in some whispering conversation, their common characteristic being an ill trimmed beard, and nerdy

clothes, quite the opposite of the "tall, dark, and handsome" Iranian playboys in a disco or a bar. There is an air of tension and intimidation created by the presence of these men. Abbas goes to the bathroom and never comes back. When I glance quickly behind me, I realize that he has joined the conversation with the three Iranians. Soon one of the Iranians -- lame, tall, and stocky -- who later introduces himself as Hamid, joins our table, but sits a few chairs away. I have seen this man several times at ISGH and at a few wedding ceremonies. I open a Quran and hand it to him. He indicates that he does not wish to join. He murmurs an excuse, but I do not hear his words. All of a sudden he would interrupts us by addressing Mehdi: "If you don's mind, I would like to speak with this gentlemen alone." Mehdi leaves immediately and Hamid turns to me: "Perhaps you don't recognize me. I know you from Lawrence, Kansas."

--I sure don't! When . . . (he interrupts me:)

--Never mind! I have listened several times to your radio program.²³ Why do you attack Iman Khomeini?

--In the blink of an eye I remember how lucky I am to be in the free land of unbelief, rather than a prisoner in the Islamic paradise of Khomeini, where you are not even asked "Why?" So I answer:

--I support peace.

--This is what the great Satan America wants.

--So be it; but I don't think that America and I necessarily want the same thing. I simply say a Muslim should not kill a Muslim.²⁴ We should not support this madness of killing.

--Who wants war?

--You tell me; I don't...(he interrupts me again:)

--If you believe in God -- which I don't think you do -- is it right to speak against Islam, when Muslims are engaged in Jihad with the unbelievers.²⁵ (Now I interrupt him)

-- Wait a second! How do you know that I don't believe...

--By your actions. I know you from Lawrence, Kansas.

--What about Lawrence, Kansas?

--Hell you know! The reason I told the other guy to leave is that I did not wish to embarrass you. My Islamic morality doesn't let me embarrass the sinners. (I sense what he is getting at, but I want to hear what he has to say.

--We are all sinners, but what specific sins?

--Music, dance, adultery, and so forth. Music and dance I love!

--But they are Mahram!

--Not in my opinion. Many great Muslims such as Rumi...

--Never mind! In the book of Ogha (Khomeini) ...

--Never mind Khomeini; he has his opinion; I have mine.

--How about other "signs of godhood"? ²⁶

--They have their opinions, too. Let's get to the issue of adultery; this may be more exiting! Have you seen me in action?

--Well you see, holding the hand of a girl who is not your Mahram is a kind of adultery.

--Do I get stoned to death? How many lashes...

--I am not an Islamic judge. If such should judge that you need some lashes, even I would have to do it to you.

--You see brother,...

--I am not your brother!

--You see, whatever your name is, here is our difference. I don't consider holding a girl's hand adultery. It may be a sin, but not adultery. It depends on one's intentions...

--Quran says it is.

--Nothing about holding...

--Kafi... ²⁷

--I have read it; I believe in some of it.

--Then I am right to say you don't believe in God.

--God has not written Kafi.

--Then if I say the book of Agha, you will say he, God forbid, is not a faqih (expert of jurisprudence).

--On the contrary, he is a good faqih in a sense.

--Then you believe some of what he says and do not believe some.

--Exactly! Right is right.

--What kind of Shi'ite are you? Whom do you imitate?²⁸

--I don't have to tell even if I do imitate or not. I have one of the three choices,²⁹

--Even Shariatmadari...³⁰ (I interrupt him:)

--You mean that great scholar Ayatollah...

--He committed mistakes.

--It is your opinion.

--I am not here tonight to fight you.

--I know; we are having a conversation...

--Yes! As a Muslim I tolerate if you insult me; but if you insult Islam I don't tolerate it.

--We are having a friendly conversation. You should not even mention the word "fight." It scares me because...

--I know and you should watch. Once we stabbed a guy eighteen times! I am telling you as my religious duty, do not attack Iman on the Zionist radio. The only reason why they let you have a program is that you tell them what they want to hear. You are helping them against yourself.

--I look back and notice that Abbas and the two other Iranians are halfway listening to us. For a moment I think

there is a plan to stab me. I decide that if I am to die, I should do so bravely; so I say: Listen! Fortunately I will die only once. Dying for ones belief is glorious. I have expected this moment all...³¹

--Who wants to kill you? You are nothing.

--I know, but you are threatening me!

--What threat? If you try to stab, I will defend myself. I am simply reasoning (bayyaenah) with you not to help Zionists.³² I am not even asking such a godless person as you to join us. You see all these Muslims? They are all with us. Have respect for our brothers who are fighting Saddam, who has raped the country of Islam! Why do you become happy when Saddam has the upper hand? Why are you sad when we win?

--I am not happy at any rate. There is no winning --

it

is all losing.

--Despite people like you, Saddam will fall.

--I hope so. I don't like the guy.

--Why do you have that anti-Islamic radio show?

--You mean anti-war!

--You play music there and it is Haram.

--I don't--Others do.

--You participate in it.

--Still I don't...

--Yes you do. If you sit with the ones who drink alcohol as if you were drinking alcohol yourself....

--Don't you participate in performing marriage ceremonies? I have seen you in such events. There is alcohol, music, and dance there. So, by your logic, you have committed everything I have.

--That is different.

--Yes, because they pay you money.

He is not able to stand me any longer. He joins the other Iranians. I light up a cigarette. Mehdi joins me. Abbas also returns, but only after he is assured that the other Iranians have left. They are actually still nearby. He appears to be apologetic. I ask him to ask the Iranians if they would have an interview with me for my paper. "They left," he says. I insist that they are still around. Abbas reluctantly gets up to go ask them. He returns soon, bearing some literature. "They were talking about you; I did not want to interrupt them." The literature is of the following nature: Al-Jihad, a magazine published by the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Arabic, containing an article in it concerning the history of the clergymen's struggle against secularism; a weekly newspaper also entitled ClJihad; the Arabic version of the magazine Surush, featuring chemical warfare on the cover, and on the inside showing Khomeini voting, the Arabic version of the state-controlled

Kayhan, with headlines concerning Iran/Iraq war and claiming Iran as having the upper hand in the Persian Gulf; and Alawah (4/84) from "a group of warrior scholars (Cllama al-Mujahidin) in Iraq." The mailing address, of course, is in Iran, suggesting a covert relation between the Islamic Republic and the "rebels" of Iraq. This journal opens with an old declaration of Khomeini, from April 22, 1981, eulogizing the martyr Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, in his representative in Iraq. Khomeini wonders "why the Iraqi army and the rest of the military forces have become tools in the hands of these criminals," expressing disappointment. He calls upon lower ranking officers, etc., to revolt against the foundations of aggression, as happened in Iran. So they should run away from their barricades and free their shoulders from disgraces of the Ba'th Party.

As i go to my car, the pro-Khomeini Iranians are still carrying on the conversation.

Monday, Ramadhan 11

For some unknown reason, the number of people attending has decreased--fatgiue of Ramadhan fasting? The first day of the work week? Just a coincidence? But despite this, the number of pro-Khomeini supporters has increased to ten. I notice that these men do not usually sit together, but disperse throughout a crowd, each engaging in a conversation with someone. One can even hear them from far away, usually

in monologue, proclaiming their belief. They move around quite a bit in order to assist each other when necessary, to ensure their propagation is effective. As Tarawih prayer begins --as I mentioned, Shi'ites consider Tarawih an abrogated tradition and thus forbidden -- they convene behind the walls to evaluate the success of their mission. a major thrust of the conversation is gossip. If they don't like someone, namely an anti-revolutionary, they don't hesitate to provide each other with fantastical information which is not usually anything more than what they want to believe about the person in question. They also do not hesitate to go around and inform their non-Iranian brothers to avoid a certain person because his Islamic beliefs are shaky. This method of ostracizing is effective with their more naive clients. I know they do this both from observing facial reactions and gestures from a distance as well as hearing tales passed on by friends about points of gossip.

One hour before sunset, the pots are boiling in the kitchen, usually rice, beef stew, green beans, and sometimes fried chicken. Some people who desire a more sophisticated meal bring their own. One or two people are always in charge of cutting plenty of watermelon to quench the thirst of the summer fast. There is also plenty of boiled water and tea bags. Everyone makes his own tea. It is only in the kitchen that men and women work together, men because

their strength may be needed, such as to lift a heavy pot, women because it is their traditional area of expertise. This duty does not rotate, but is performed by one group assigned for the entire month. Competitive with the Coca-Cola is a Pakistani drink made from suger and rose-water. Some say it is quite good. I will keep my opinion to myself. As the pots are boiling, watermelons cut, and sometimes bananas placed in dishes, several people help to set up tables and chairs. There is always an Indian man with a large box containing some fo the most delicious dates tasted on this continent. He stands at the door of the mosque and offers one to each of his person, along with a napkin. The professional recitor or one of his chief assistants recites the Quran. Then there is Czan (call for prayer). At this point many of the prople break their fasts with the dates. Dates have a sacred character to Muslims. They were a major source of nutrition for early Arabs, a favorite fruit of the apostle of God, as well as a staple for Muslim warriors. There is a scientific myth that the date sugar passes directly from the mouth into the blood stream to provide energy and strength. The Sunni majority show no hesitation in breaking their fast early, for a tradition holds that a good Muslim should do so.³³ The minority Shi'ites somewhat reluctantly hold their dates until after Magrib prayer, for they hold the technical

sunset to be a few minutes later than the actual one. After Maghrib prayer, everyone stands in line for his share of the break-fast dinner. Everyone shakes hands with everyone else and wishes Divine acceptance upon them. It is primarily men who do the serving, but sometimes women participate as well. Men usually talk to the public, but the women don't even look at the men. As people eat, there is often an instruction from an authority that everyone should throw their paper plates into the garbage, rather than leaving them on the table. The Secretary of Membership, Tahir Assafi, with his loud voice, is quite good at such announcements, and his charismatic personality encourages all to cooperate. Tahir also sometimes takes the alms box around and asks for donations. A particular table is set in the middle for the guests, (professional recitors, etc.) where they, their family, and close associates break their fast.

Tonight Shaikh Barakat sings some prayers from Quran at the dinner. I sense right away that he is going to leave soon, either temporarily or for good. Later, as people are standing in lines for Isha prayer, Barakat notices a young teenage boy standing in the front line. He turns and says, "Well we know that kids should not stand in the front row. The heirarchy is that men should stand in the front rows, then boys, then women. What are you a child or a man?" The

boy says, "A man," and he is reluctant to give up his position. Several encouragements come from the audience. "Of course he is a man. A child in age, but a man in mind." Barakat smiles and lets him keep his position. This event can signify various facts. Perhaps the boy has just reached the age of puberty, technically 15 lunar years. Perhaps he has grown some thick pubic hair, another sign of puberty, regardless of age. Perhaps the night before he had his first wet dream. Any of these would justify the boys claim to being a man. Perhaps it is none of these, but the boy just wants to be a man before his time.

During Isha prayer, Barakat commits two errors. He is corrected by one of his followers. Symbolically this is significant of the fact that a follower is not only not admonished, but rewarded for correcting his Imam. One does not break his prayer in order to do so, or simply note the mistake and proceed to say the rest of the prayer by himself. He shouts the correct verse, if it is a mistake in wording, or indicates by raising his voice to indicate "pay attention." Once Imam corrects himself, everyone goes on following. Symbolically this practice can be applied to the procedure of correcting Imam in matters of social leadership. After the prayer, Barakat turns to the audience and apologizes for his absentmindedness. "I am leaving tomorrow to attend an international contest of recitation of

Quran in Malaysia. That's why I became somewhat absent-minded. thank You for correcting me, may Allah reward you. I hope I will see you soon."

After Maghrib prayer I discover that my shoes have been lost. Before entering the mosque, one is required to remove one's shoes. When a fairly large group of people remove their shoes and place them outside the door, it is very easy to mistake another's shoes for one's own, sometimes purposefully. In the Iranian shrines, particularly in Mashad and Qum, as well as in many other crowded mosques, there is a Kafshdari, an office which keeps the shoes of the pilgrims and worshippers. The one in charge of Kafshdar (keeping the shoes) gives a numbered token in exchange for each pair, which is then returned after prayer along with a tip. Thus Kafshdori is a big business in some places, which one either inherits from one's father or buys from someone. It proves to be quite an efficient system. In places where the attendance is not so great, one either carries his shoes with him under his arm, or leaves them outside the door. In the latter case there is a good possibility they will not be there for when one returns. either someone has mistaken them for his own, or a Kafshdozd (shoe thief) has stolen it. Kafshdozdi is not a common crime, but it happens. It is a petty crime, and does not merit the heinous punishment of handchopping. I remember as a child in my home town of

Yazd, a shoe-thief was caught and embarrassed in public, with a big bag of shoes on his back. There is a famous anecdote that if a shoe-thief is caught repeating his act, he should be made Imam of the prayer. This gives him a profession that makes him needless of stealing shoes, and also, as he stands in front, everyone can keep their eye on him. But it is not only shoe thieves that are responsible for taking someone's shoes; it could be a "practical joke." A few minutes after I discover that my shoes are gone, theories emerge from everywhere: "Are you sure you had your shoes when you came to the masjid?" "They are here somewhere; you just can't see them." "Someone has mistaken them with his own; he will bring them back." "shoes are never stolen here. It is the first time..." "Shoes are stolen here if they are brand new." "The ones who don't like you have done it." "It is a way of keeping the unwanted out of the masjid." "It is non-Muslims attempting to ruin our name. They steal so many things from here." "It must be the pro-Khomeinis. I'll talk to them about it." "Search the trash cans." "They just wanted to bother you. In America no one needs to steal shoes. They must be hidden somewhere." At any rate, I drive home barefoot.

Tuesday, Ramadhan 12

The number of people attending has again decreased dramatically. Only one pro-Khomeini activist is present

tonight. It is a night for liberal Iranians to show, for some unknown reason. I discover that the substitute for Barakat is a high-ranking Egyptian scholar, Shaikh Zahir al-Zoghbi, who has come to reside in Houston for consultation on Islamic matters. We speak briefly and agree we should meet at a more appropriate time for an interview. I mention I have seen him with Mahalawi and he jumps at my statement as if it were an accusation. "Oh I just happened to be in the same place. I'm not with him." The recitation session is conducted by senior pupils of Barakat and it is much shorter than before.

A Pakistani health professional is carrying on an argument with Mr. Y.: "Why don't you act as a missionary to attract non-Muslims to Islam?" Mr. Y. is a high school dropout who served as concierge in the masjid on Richmond Avenue and was later attracted to the Saudi Educational Mission. He is also the only Mexican Muslim I have ever known of in this masjid. He is dressed in Islamic garb, with a white turban, white long coat, and white pants, and has a peach-fuzz beard with shaven moustache. He reminds me of the theological students of Qum seminaries, many of whom are also high school dropouts. He responds by saying, "There are thousands of Muslims in this town, and yet it is sometimes hard even to have the minimum of five people to hold Friday prayer."³⁴ How can I work as a missionary when

Muslims themselves don't practice Islam? It just doesn't work." The other man is persistent, "We have a revolution to carry out in the land of unbelief. One Muslim life is worth more than those of all the unbelievers. One cannot kill a Muslim. But unbelievers, if the authorities command it, should be killed." I do not follow his logic, but wish not to interrupt. He continues, "The criticism directed at Imam Khomeini of Iran is much greater than that directed at you. See how for the sake of Allah he kills the unbelievers. Nothing should stop us from obeying Allah. We must be inventive and always seek new ways of propagating Islam. I begin to follow his logic: propagation of Islam is not limited to the times when there is a market for such goods. The logic which dictates the necessity of such propagation cannot be judged by the logic of liberalism. One should not hesitate in any circumstance. Mr. Y answers that the best way of propagating Islam is "the old way, the way of the apostle, who served as an example. If one is a good example, others will follow. Words don't mean too much if they are not practised." The other man disagrees, "Of course they do. When, for example, Americans criticize Imam Khomeini, I ask them, "Do you know what revolution is? It is to turn everything upside down. It requires blood, and sometimes the wet and the dry burn together." I do not wish to comment on the Iranian revolution. Their debate seems to

be leading absolutely nowhere.

Wednesday Afternoon, Ramadhan 13

For the noon prayer, there are only six people in attendance, including Imam Shaikh Zahir Al-Zoghbi, who has substituted for Shaikh Barakat. Someone is engaged in repairing the air conditioner, and he is told to stop and join the prayer. He is reluctant, but at last he does. After the prayer Al-Zoghbi is told there is a marriage ceremony awaiting him. In the office he gives the bride, Kay, and the groom, Muhammad Ali from Iran, the marriage forms. Kay desires to convert before the actual Islamic marriage ceremony. They have already been married according to Christian laws for two years. As they are filling in the forms, Al-Zoghbi insists that Muhammad Naseem of India, a scholar and colleague of his, should perform the ceremony. Al-Zoghbi repeatedly calls him his "professor", pretending Naseem has much greater authority and grace than he, a classic example of the self-humility of Muslims. The response from Naseem is also self-humbling. Al-Zoghbi is tired and wants to go home or perhaps the important question I asked him previously concerning exegesis of Quran was obsessing him and he wants the first opportunity to speak with me about it. Naseem begs me to beg him to stay; so he does. First Naseem puts on his white Indian style cloak and meets with the young couple who are accompanied by a man and

woman who are not married to each other. Naseem begins by bringing up the issue of Islam, specifically, "There is no priesthood in our religion. Anyone can do this, even yourselves. Unlike in Christianity and Judaism, where one must go to the priest or Rabbi to perform marriage; in Islamic tradition, a trusted representative of the bride and groom can do it. I don't like the term 'conversion'; sister, you are not converting, you are reforming. Islam is not only the religion of Muhammad, it is also the religion of Moses and Jesus. The term 'Christianity; was not used by Jesus but by later generations, who modified the teachings of Jesus. thus when we say, "There is only one religion and that is Islam," we mean that all the apostles carried the same message from the same God." In a very serious manner, he addresses Kay, "Sister, you are not obliged to convert to Islam. You may keep your religion intact if you wish to do so." Kay indicates her need to "reform". Naseem says, "Then let it be so." In the next stage Naseem explains in detail the three foundations of Islam: oneness of God, prophethood, and the resurrection day. "I advise you on behalf of Islamic law to avoid pork and to avoid wine and other alcoholic beverages. You should learn from today to say your prayers and to fast. Having a Muslim husband, in a few months you will gradually learn the prayer. And remember, 'cover' is very important; you may only show your

face and hands to others."

The next stage is utterance of the two testimonies:
"Sister, repeat after me: I witness there is no deity but Allah, Muhammad is His servant slave and His messenger."
The next stage is prayer. All present raise their hands and pray for her, that she might be a good Muslim and have a happy, prosperous life. Then there is the actual ceremony itself. Each party acknowledges to accept each other as legal spouse, according to the law of Islam. Muhammad Ali and Kay, as I have mentioned, have brought only one man and one woman with them. There are not enough appointed witnesses. There have to be at least two men or one man and two women. Naseem does not seem to want to disclose at this point that, in the matter of witnessing, woman is counted as half a man. He looks at me and says, "You and this gentleman sign as witnesses." Al-Zoghbi volunteers to act as witness. The designated witness woman is somewhat annoyed but keeps quiet. There is no fee for what I have done," Naseem says. "I hope it was to the pleasure of Allah that I did it. Yet it is a tradition that each couple married in the center donate \$50 for this institution. You can donate if you wish when you pick up your marriage contract."

I am supposed to give Al-Zoghbi a ride home. In the yard he speaks to a bearded American Muslim about some

"quarrel," saying, "A Muslim should not quarrel with his Muslim brothers." I have heard that the man he addresses has quarreled with the authorities of ISGH, "Why have they again this year invited Barakat, who shaves his beard?" On the way home, and in Al-Zoghbi's house, we solve the hermeneutical issue by agreeing that one should not be too bookish and logical in matters of religion. He says: "One has to have faith." I reflect upon Kierkegaard's dilemma of Fear and Trembling. He also expresses his views on political events. He seems to be a very reasonable man with sound ideas.

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Friday Prayer, Ramadhan 15

For the second time, my research assistant has come to the Masjid, this time a short while before me. I had told him about some of the do's and don't do's of field work. I also reminded him that his observation today will be independent and will have nothing to do with mine. I wanted to know how much an outsider can observe. The following is the complete text of his report:

12:50 -- I have arrived at the masjid for Friday prayer. This will be my first time to attend an orthodox Muslim ritual. There is not much activity. I know that it is customary to perform ablution, but I have heard of at least three different specific techniques, so I wish to inquire about the proper procedure and where to perform it. I go to the main office. Buzdar is busy, and there is another man who seems to be important, perhaps the Imam. He is sitting and chatting, not too deeply, with several men. I wonder if he is al-Zoghbi. (I find out later he is.) But I decide not to disturb him. I leave and meet Mehdi in the court-yard. He speaks to me in French, "Il y a quelques choses impropres dans votre auto. Il ne faut pas que les autres les voir." At first I do not understand, but then I snap. He also suggests I skip ablutions; but this being my first time to participate, I ignore his advice. First I go to my car and remove the copies of Studio X and a cassette

of a hard-core/reggae band from my dashboard. Then I find the ablution room myself and try to inconspicuously follow what the others do. There is only one other man inside. I do not see the man wash his feet, but I do so anyway. He may have done it before I entered. I do not wash to the elbows, only my hands. Also my face and head. I notice the bars of soap, but I have never heard of their use in ritual ablution, so I skip the soap. Because of the warning Mehdi had given me, I try to look and be sincere through the whole process, especially when greeting someone. With relaxed face and clear eyes, I still might be suspected of something, but no one is likely to confront me directly. The procedure goes without a hitch. I exit and put my shoes back on.

I find Mehdi again, and he says he will stay and observe outside. I enter the prayer hall, sit and observe. Instead of reciting prayers, I consciously relax myself for several minutes, trying to attune to my environment. The men around me are mostly in western garb: good jeans or casual suits; Izod shirts; a jersey saying "Adidas" . . . Not many have their heads covered. Perhaps ten percent of the men wear the traditional loose pants and long shirt, or dash-dash, with Islamic designs embroidered on some. I have been warned not to observe the women, in order to avoid controversy. But I notice that they are virtually all in

Islamic garb. They all stand or sit in the back corner. There are many copies of Quran and some other literature on shelves at the side of the room. All English copies are translated by Yousuf Ali.

Mehdi joins me and offers to show me the units of prayer which the others are performing. He shows me the details of touching my ears, genuflection and prostration. He points out the seven points of contact with the ground: toes, knees, hands, and forehead. I worry slightly about us talking during prayer, but the others seem to accept it, since it is an important topic. We do two units together. I do not understand the Arabic except for several words. Now a man stands in front and recites Quran in a rich, beautiful voice. It does not matter too much that I can't understand the words, because the music is able to communicate a lot.

Next the man I saw in the office, one of the only ones present wearing a turban, ascends the pulpit. He lectures, alternating between Arabic and English. He exhorts us to observe the fasts, feasts, and prayers of Ramadhan, but not to stop there -- to be better Muslim throughout the year. There is no mention of politics in the sermon. I recognize several passages from Quran that are apparently very popular aphorisms. After the sermon, someone insists we fill in the rows so we are shoulder to shoulder, and then we again pray,

genuflect, etc. I notice a half dozen men leaving, and my mind flashes to a paranoid vision of radical separatist exiting prayer, returning with sub machine guns . . . But luckily this is a silly fantasy. We turn and shake the hands of the people on each side of us, although not every one does this greeting. We exchange, "Salam Alaikum." As we leave, there is an alms box at the door, and a man is outside with another box, loudly requesting donations. I put on my shoes, noticing the vast variety, from sneakers to cowboy boots to some kind of skin -- alligator? -- but no one else has Chinese slippers, whereas most of my close associates own one or several pairs. Many handshakes are taking place. I am not able to distinguish the various nationalities very well, with a few exceptions. Several shake hands with me in sincere, friendly gestures of welcome. But I catch a nervous or uncomfortable look in several men's eyes when mine happen to meet theirs by chance. Mehdi introduces me to some Iranian men, a couple of whose names I recognize from his reports. One of them asks what I do and I reply, "I write . . . poetry, dissertations, etc." He says I should read what Quran says about the poets in the surah by that name. He says it is not positive, but would be helpful nonetheless; the main emphasis being that one should not fantasize, but write from reality. They ask about my fast, and I reply that this is

only my third day to go without water, but I have gone many of the days without eating, and I went over 48 hours without breaking fast earlier in the week, on only water. They seem neither impressed nor disdainful, but seem pleased that I at least have an interest. Mehdi points out the pro-Khomeini fanatic of "we stabbed a guy 18 times." He seems to fit my expectations, not necessarily severe, but tense and not at all cheerful, and with a noticeable limp in his walk.

As I wander to the other side of the courtyard, I catch the commercial threat. "These aren't selling too well today," says a man holding a half-dozen knitted caps. I notice several other skull-caps being worn and I think about the nonfunctional Islamic designs in these and some of the clothing. I wonder if these decorations echo an ancient pragmatic function. Mehdi approaches the table of newspapers and magazines and picks up an English copy of a paper. The man behind the table motions for him to leave it alone, as if he would only be wasting it instead of reading it. I look to see if there might be a price on it, but it is free. I glance over the headlines: Pakistan, Lebanon, etc. I do not understand why the man made him put it back, unless it was strictly personal against Mehdi. I observe an air of disdain from this man toward me, but not overt hostility. I look over some more literature. There is a call from Khomeini for a day a commemoration of Jerusalem, bearing a

barbed-wire star of David.

Back on the other end of the courtyard, I notice three liquid dispensers on a table and wonder why they are there, since everyone is fasting, but I am told they are empty until nighttime. I ask Mehdi about an elderly man in white with a white turban, with many younger men around him. Mehdi says, "I don't know, just an old man, I guess." But he seems to hold some authority, or at least respect among _ say that the people of the book, that is, Jews and Christians, are ritually pure if they wash in front of you. Some say every non-Muslim is ritually impure without exception. If a non-Muslim makes ablution, he can, in some people's eyes, pollute the washing room and the masjid. Hassan says he understands after I explain it, but earlier, not realizing the possible controversy, he ignored my advice and performed ablution anyway. Fortunately there were no problems.

As Hassan goes to hide the items in his car, I go to the office, where a group of men are gathered, among them, a Zoghbr. Upon my arrival, he greets me warmly. We shake hands and rub our faces together. He tells me he has prepared for the sermon and I am going to like it. I say, "It is customary in Iran for the Khatib to deliver his sermon while holding a sword, spear, or at least a cane." Egypt, too," he replies; "A wooden sword. It is the symbol

of power." "And a symbol of authority," I add. "Yes you are right. "Why don't you do it here?" I ask, but before he replies he is interrupted by a question from someone else, who takes al-Zoghbi away from me.

We decide that Hassan should sit in the mosque and I should sit outside and observe the day. It doesn't quite work, because Hassan is not able to catch on to the prayer. I go to him and we perform two units of prayer together. I show him how to perform genuflection and prostration. I decide we should sit together in case there is anything else that might need explaining. Al-Zoghbi begins his sermon in classical Arabic, and then translates it into English with an extremely heavy Egyptian accent. Hassan sits in various unconventional postures. When the prayer is finished, we immediately move outside.

A few Iranians greet me and I introduce Hassan to them. Someone asks if he is a Muslim. He is learning and has been fasting for Ramadhan. One asks him what his occupation is. "Writer-Poet," he says. The Iranian says, "There is a chapter in Quran about the poets.³⁵ They are condemned."³⁶ "Not really," I interrupt. "First of all, the chapter is named after poets, but it is not necessarily about them. Second is that Muslim poets, according to the same verse, are an exception to the rule."³⁷ The prophet himself distinguishes between proper poetry and improper poetry."

(I explain in a few minutes Muhammad's view on poetry.)³⁸

The merchandise table of the Pakistanis has been mostly taken over by the pro-Khomeini Iranians, and they have several kinds of newspapers and magazines, all published in Iran. There is a poster commemorating Rooz -e- Quds, the day named after Quds, or Jerusalem. Muslims of the world are encouraged to help the Iranian Muslims to liberate the Quds via liberating Baghdad. Their leader, Abdul Hamid Yunusi, is constantly engaged in providing extra information for people who show an interest in such free literature. I try to grab one of the newspapers, but Abdul Hamid takes it back and says, "This is not of use to unbelievers. You don't need it." I have become quite infamous for advocating peace. I am positive he does not like me at all. I say, "Just looking, I know what is in there." But in order to show him that he can't stop me from obtaining such "secret literature," I ask someone if I can borrow the magazine they just picked up. "Sure. Any time," he says.

I am getting in my car when Abbas stops me." It disturbed me when Abdul Hamid did that in public, particularly when you were with a new Muslim. Abbas does not want Hassaan to realize more about the situation, so I send him back to Rice so we can have a more private discussion.

I say, "I expected such reaction and it was okay."

"The only really bad part was when he pointed you out to that black American Muslim as an anti-Islamic element who deserves to be treated like that," Abbas says; "I'll explain his action to him."

"You don't need to defend me," I say. "God is defender of the unbelievers."³⁹ If you say anything to him, do it for the sake of your faith and tell him that the apostle says, 'I was chosen by God to complete the best of moralities.' Certainly Muhammad did not treat the non-Muslims like that. Certainly I am no worse than Pharaoh and Abdul Hamid is no better than Moses. God ordered Moses to speak to Pharaoh softly." Even though someone else has committed the error, Abbas is ashamed because everyone around the table saw what Hamid did. I suppose he has to explain things to them, as well as to his own conscience.

Saturday afternoon, Ramadhan 16

It is four o'clock and there is quite a scene in the courtyard. A marriage ceremony has just ended, and it is just like what one might expect at the gate of a Christian church: women in long pink and white sleeveless dresses; and a short, dark man in a tuxedo is hugging his bride and kissing her passionately on the lips. They do not seem to realize what an unorthodox thing they are doing. About ten young Muslims are sitting and glaring at them. I suggest to one of them that if he doesn't like it, he should take it

upon himself to inform them that there is not supposed to be any hanky panky here. "It is all our fault," he answers, "When the pious Imam of the masjid approves of such promiscuous activities, what can we young ones say? Do you know they went inside the masjid just the way you see them? Al-Zoghbi performed the ceremony, then they took photos. Al-Zoghbi stood beside the bride, and she put her arms around him. It was ridiculous. I told him that he should not put up with such a thing. He told me -- can you believe he told me? -- he told me, 'It is perfectly okay. We always do it in al-Azhar . . . I am not able to believe these pious men.' And then when I became angry, Mr. Buzdar told al-Zoghbi, 'Ignore this young man . . . I am angry. We should do something about this sort of thing, so that it doesn't happen again.'" The bride and the groom have their third and longest kiss on the lips. Then they get into their Mercedes Benz and drive away.

Saturday Evening, Ramadhan 16

The number of worshipers has again drastically reduced. They can't be partying, it is Ramadhan. "Where is everybody," I ask someone. "I don't know, but the regulars are here. Last night was no better, either. After the prayer, Taher Asaffi says, "Brothers, I'm going to tell you something you won't like, but I have to. Last night I collected only \$3.50 out of the donation box. I'm not

asking even for a dollar, but please, fifty cents apiece. That is nothing. And also, let me tell you, please clean your tables and take your plates to the garbage. As you would do in a cafeteria, do the same here."

Saturday night, Ramadhan 16

It is 1:00 a.m. Shafiq Helmi asks all those sitting in the courtyard to help clean the yard and fold chairs. We all get up. Someone suggests that while we are working I should recite some Quran and prayer. I am reminded of the Negro songs when they worked as slaves in the fields and sang. I consent and everyone seems impressed by my delivery. When we finish, almost everyone asks me to recite some more. I start singing some Arabic poems, the subject of which is confession of sins and asking forgiveness from the Almighty. Abraham, a boy of 20, who has a beautiful voice, sings also. We take turns singing. Abdul Hafiz joins us. He seems impressed, but also worried. "What do you think?" I ask him. "It is a kind of family feud. You two are competing for a position in the masjid. The one with the more beautiful voice will get the job." He smiles. I reply, "Not at all." I was introduced to Abraham at the beginning of Ramadhan, when he wore a green tee-shirt advertising "Hungry International." I discovered that he was working in this Iranian-owned restaurant where ham sandwiches and the forbidden brews, domestic and imported,

were served. Initially I assumed that I had found another relativist like myself, not seeing a contradiction between being a Muslim and working in a dining-wining establishment. Two days later he had replaced the tee-shirt with a long white dash-dash which he wore for the rest of the month. He impresses everyone by his ability to recite Quran from memory. He has lead the prayer several times and was in my opinion better than any of the professional Imams. Once I asked him if he was still working at Hungry International and he replied, "I quit. It was not proper. I think it belongs to an Iranian Jew. I am a Palestinian, and I can't work in a restaurant that serves 'Tel Aviv sandwich' and Israeli beer." This quiet man reminds me of the superficiality of some observations. Had I not seen his piety in the masjid, I would think he was an Arab playboy beer drinker who shows up in the masjid once a year for repentance. And he even forgets to get rid of his incriminating tee-shirt. Had I seen him in Hungry International, cooking or cleaning tables, how could I have imagined him to be such a stern Muslim and one of the best young reciters I have heard in my life?

Soon a conversation follows our recitation of Arabic poetry. I don't know what lead up to this, but Abdul Hafiz asks me, "What do you think about men and women mixing in the masjid?"

M.--Sounds all right to me. I think we should end this segregation.

A-H.--What segregation? It is horrible as it is. Men and women sit together and soon there will even be hanky panky.

M.--Hanky panky is in our minds. If we train our eyes and hearts, men and women sitting together is all right.

A-H.--You consider yourself a Muslim?

M.--Of course. Islam means submission. Submission to truth.

The fact is that segregation does not stop people from hanky panky. Sitting together does not necessarily lead to it.

A-H.--The Jews and Christians did not get into hanky panky from the beginning and overnight. First they said, as you seem to say, that they are brothers and sisters in faith. Then they hold hands and then they hug once in a while. Then finally . . . you know! (He obviously means "know" in the biblical sense.) I am afraid the same thing is happening in our Muslim communities. You already see women at the Sunday evening picnics without there heads covered.

M.--You see, brother, again I emphasize on education. Don't you think that the lustful eye is able to penetrate women's dresses. And let me tell you, in order to cleanse

the filth of sexism from our hearts, we should realize that cover is not only for women, but for men as well. Our well-trimmed hair, neck, and hairy chest, not to mention our rounded butt and testicles in our tight pants are sexy to women. Don't you think they can have lustful eyes on us? In the matter of cover, men are very hypocritical. Until fifty years ago, with the rise of secularism, men had head covers too, turban, hat, and kifyah. Then we submitted to this "liberation." Our women were also to be "liberated," but then many of them returned to their covers. But if cover is not required for a man, why should it be compulsory for women?

A-H.--You see, you are mixing things up. For a man, the cover constitutes much less than what it does for women. A man can say prayer, if only he covers his pubic area. A woman must cover herself from head to toe, otherwise his prayer is void.

M.--It is you who is mixing up dressing for prayer and dressing in public. It is improper for a man to appear in public in swimming trunks, isn't it? But let us focus on the very nature of "nakedness." I am a student of anthropology, a discipline which primarily studies primitive societies. We study naked tribes. Have you heard of the Nuer? They go around naked all the time. There is less rape among them than in our orthodox Muslim communities, in

fact, as far as I know, there is no rape at all there. Family is a sacred institution, bound by laws that everyone obeys. This society as well as many other naked societies have absolutely no problem functioning.

A.--But they are not Muslims.

M.--Of course not. What I am trying to tell you is that cover is a subjective matter, relative to the society. It is culturally defined. Indians and Pakistanis do not consider a portion of their backs and bellies as needing covering; and women in the rural areas of Egypt, working in the fields, have never had what you may call, "proper Islamic covering." The nomads of Persia always expose a part of their hair on both sides of their headcover. I can go on forever. (Abraham interrupts:)

Abr.--I tend to agree with this brother. Don't our experts of jurisprudence say that for Negro women, the breast, shoulder, and stomach are not awrat (requiring cover). They think they are ugly enough to discourage men from wanting to look at them.

A-H.--Where, who says that?

Abr.--It is famous. Haven't you heard of it?

M.--Anyway this is bigotry and prejudice. I think the Nuer are extremely gorgeous. I saw a documentary movie of them. The majority are in excellent physical shape. The men have very muscular bodies and the women have firm

breasts, narrow waists, . . .

Abr.--You don't feel ashamed at having viewed that dirty movie? You seem to be proud of committing that sin.

M.--What sin? This is my job. For me, human is human, and I certainly did not watch the movie with lustful eyes.

Muhammad asks: What about the doctors who treat breast cancer?

A-H.--That's a different case. Someone's life is in danger. But if someone neglects to study the naked savages, there is no such danger.

M.--For an anthropologist, there is no sexual danger in studying these naked tribes. But enough of that. All I wanted to say is that cover is relative. It definitely changes from culture to culture. We should not be so picky about this kind of superficial issue.

Abr.--You think this is a superficial issue?

M.--No, I'm sorry, what I mean to say is that the issue is somewhat vague and I told you my position. According to Islam, both men and women should wear modest clothing. They should not provoke each others sexuality, but think instead of bigger sins committed in our community.

A-H.--Such as?

M.--Well war is one issue. Many of those hear actively support bloodshed. What is the general position on the Iran-Iraq war? What has been accomplished by getting more

than half a million people killed? It has certainly helped the arms dealers and warmongers, but it has not helped the cause of Islam. And in this small community, there is much backbiting over this issue. Quran equates this with eating the dead flesh of one's brother.⁴⁰ This is ridiculous. Your Iranian brothers have called me such names as "gay," "playboy," "Jewish," etc. And I am telling you, Muslims listen to this kind of hogwash and they do not doubt it and such gossip does not bother them. But at the same time, if a women participates out of sheer goodwill in the activities of the community, every man shouts, "Islam is gone with the wind?"

A.H--Well it seems that you don't like Khomeini.

M.--I don't like what he has done to us. And I think his doctrine of leadership is an innovation.⁴¹ It has more to do with Plato's philosopher-king than with Islamic leadership.⁴²

Faraydun, a Kurd, jumps in: I hate Saddam. This bastard has killed Kurdish people. I like Khomeini because he is getting rid of Saddam.

M.--For what are the Kurdish people fighting?

M.--For autonomy.

M.--Do you think the Ayatollah will give you autonomy?

F.--If he doesn't we know what to do. Saddam is first, anyway.

M.--Okay. At any rate, let's go back to the question of bigger sins. I think proper education would get rid of virtually all evils. You all should read Abdallah Laroui's The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual. We have not realized ourselves yet.

A-H.--Who is he?

M.--I think a Moroccan or Tunisian. He is an historian influenced by Marxism.

A-H.--Forget it. A Muslim who turns his back against Islam and adapts Jewish ideology has no value to me.

M.--Truth is truth, whether from a Jew, Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist.

A-H.--I disagree. A non-Muslim cannot be sympathetic to the cause of Islam.

M.--I didn't say al-Laroui was sympathetic to the cause of Islam. But he is sympathetic to the Arab cause.

A-H.--For me, only Islam matters. I don't waste my time with Jewish nonsense. I don't read the work of a godless communist.

M.--I'm not sure if Laroui is a communist.

A-H.--You said he was.

M.--No, one has to distinguish between communism and Marxism. Marx, as we know him best, is a social scientist, and a damn good one. True, communism is often identified with him, but that is just one aspect of this man. There

are indeed three distinct Marx's: the young Marx, who is a philosopher, the mature Marx, who is a social scientist, and finally Marx the politician, that is to say, author of the Communist Manifesto.⁴³

A-H.--You have read all this?

M.--Yes.

A-H.--What a waste of time. A Pakistani man interrupts, and you can tell he has some mental problems. Before each sentence, he clears his throat and spit, saying "Excuse me," and he would stutter every few words. He has red eyes and body odor. "Excuse me brothers. There is nothing wrong with me. I can do all kinds of work. I am living with two Mexicans. I am not comfortable there. Excuse me, brothers. They bring girl friends, drink beer, and smoke grass. We don't have any shower, there are many mosquitos, and it is hot. Excuse me. Last night they kicked me out. Excuse me brothers. I hate my permanent residence and a Texas drivers license and social security card. I am a legal-alien. Excuse me. Here are my papers, check them out. Five months ago I got married in Pakistan. I am fine. Excuse me. I can do all kinds of jobs. I just need a place to stay, and somebody please, excuse me, please help me go back to my wife and country. I have asked everybody to help me, but they ignore me. Excuse me, brothers. I went to Ben Taub hospital. They said I was

physically and mentally, yes, physically and mentally fine. There is nothing wrong with me. I am a little bit lonesome. No one likes me because I spit. It is my bad habit. Excuse me brothers. I can do all kinds of jobs. I used to work in construction, but I don't like the Mexicans. They don't like me either."

Abdul Hafiz asks, "Have you talked to the president?"

"Yes brother," he replies, "They did not help me. Excuse me." "I will talk to them tomorrow. Everything will be fine. And tonight you can sleep in the back room here." assures Abdul Hafiz.

"Yes brother. Thank you brother. Excuse me brother. Can somebody give me fifty cents for a Coke?"

Sunday evening, Ramadhan 17

Abdul Hafiz has mentioned dissatisfaction with the behavior, specifically in respect to "cover", at these picnics held every Sunday evening in the courtyard. There are so many people present that there is no room to swing a cat. There are not enough chairs to go around. Many people were standing around in small groups or couples. From left to right one could distinguish three groupings: only men, men and women together in the middle, and only women. There is plenty of food in a wide variety. Pamphlets are being distributed around concerning the feast after Ramadhan, Eid al Fitr. And of course there is a flyer from Imamini

calling upon the Muslim scholars of the world to revolt against the regimes and to fight the super powers, whose aim is destruction of Islam and Quran. The flier does come from the Iranians, but rather from the Pakistani brothers, for whom Zia of Pakistan is not Muslim enough. A small section of this pamphlet is in Urdu. I think I know who was responsible for distributing this, because I saw a copy of the master, before photo copies were made, in the hands of Buzdar, and I was amazed that such a mellow personality was involved in this propaganda without making it publicly known.

More than two thirds of the picnickers leave before Isha prayer. When the prayer is completed, I sit with some friends around a table and recite Quran. An Egyptian man approaches the table and asks Abbas if he knows anyone in Baton Rouge. He says he does. The Egyptian addresses me in Arabic in order to convey more of his feelings. His problem is that his Christian American wife has left several months ago and is hiding herself and her baby in the house of an Iranian. He has gone there begging for help, so he could get his wife and child back. The Iranian has told him not to come there and disturb him because he hates Abbas. "Can you believe," he told me to my face, "I hate Arabs and I don't like them to come to my house. Stop coming or I will sue the hell out of you. Now I would like to find an

Iranian who can talk to him."

I tell the story to Abbas, who says he is ready to help him. The Egyptian sits with Abbas and shows an entire file to him, the cancelled checks of child support, a receipt from a registered mail letter to his wife as ultimatum, and he reads a seven page letter in English. He explains every sentence because he does not feel English can sufficiently relate his true feelings. "I am ready for any type of settlement: return, divorce, court settlement -- but I can't let the matter hang in the air." Abbas assures him of his help.

Monday night, Eve of Ramadhan 19

There are no Iranians present tonight. It is believed Ali is mortally wounded on this night, and thus it is possibly the night of Qadr. The Sunnis do not accept this night as one of the alternatives.

Wednesday night, Eve of Ramadhan 19

Again there are no Iranians, for this is the night Ali died. Whereas the Sunnis would make a special effort to come to the mosque, the Shi'ites would tend to avoid it on that night and stay with their own.

Thursday Night, Eve of Ramadhan 22

Tonight I interview a Muslim woman named Hitaji Abdul Aziz. The entire text of the interview is quoted in Appendix A.

Friday night, Eve of Ramadhan 23

This is the second night on which the orthodox Sunnis speculate as possible night of Qadr. It is not required, but is highly recommended that Muslims stay awake all night, saying prayers, reciting Quran, and renewing their covenant with God. "Qadr" is one of those multi-interpretable words; among some of its meanings are power, destiny, measurement, worth, and divine decree. The night of power is both a commemoration of the night in which Quran was revealed and the night in which the angels descend from the heavens to the earth. It is the night in which the destiny of every individual is determined by the Almighty. In Muslim countries, these speculated nights are meticulously and faithfully observed. In my religious hometown of Yazd, people assemble in the various big mosques of the city. They stay awake all night, and if they have missed a prayer during the year, they say it at this time, in order to clear their debt. There are usually 100 units of public prayer said. Then there is the emotional program of QuranBar; ar Gozoshtan, to put the Quran as intercessor over ones head and ask God for all one wishes. The Imam of the masjid delivers a speech, the unusual subject of which is the importance of the night of Qadr, the martyrdom of Ali, and forgiveness. When this emotional speech ends, the atmosphere is ready for the divine connection and the lights

are turned out. This is so no one can see any worldly object, and also so people will not be embarrassed if they start crying and wailing. The process begins with "O Lord, I ask thee by means of your revealed book and what is therein, and therein is your greatest name . . ." Then God and the fourteen infallibles are invoked as intercessors. "Thou Allah," -- ten times. "For the sake of Muhammad," -- ten times. "For the sake of Ali," -- ten times. "For the sake of Fatimah," -- ten times. And finally, "for the sake of Mahdi," -- ten times. Then the long list of wishes is uttered. Every step is taken first by the clergy, and then the people follow. The utterance of some of the names is more emotionally charged than those of others, Ali for example. It is not only the night of Qadr, but also the last night of Ali's life. The Shi'ite is losing his first Imam. Husain, the martyr of Karbala, the symbol of the Islamic revolution in Iran, is another emotional name. Fatimah, the daughter of the apostle and the mother of the Imams, always raises a strong reaction, particularly among the women. When the ritual ends, people customarily return home to have a meal and prepare for the fasting.

On this night, as on all nights of Ramadhan, people are given some rose water in their cupped hands and everyone rubs this on their faces. There is a famous story that once a mischievous guy played a practical joke on his fellow

Muslims on the night of Qadr. He mixed some black ink in with the rose water and distributed it among the believers when the lights were out. When the lights came back on, everyone had a black face, and they did not understand how this had happened. The guy panicked everyone, because they assumed their faces were blackened because of their sins.

Here in Houston, such devotional rituals are not observed, except, perhaps in private gatherings. In comparison with the Shi'ite rituals for this night, those of the Sunni seem quite lifeless. Only a few people come to the masjid for the all-night wishes. I am sitting in the courtyard reflecting on the lack interesting material for my study. Suddenly I notice, as if from out of nowhere, an Iraqi guy, a charismatic fellow of about 35, tall, stocky, and dark, with an untrimmed beard, a small white turban, and a long white dash-dash. I have noticed him in the masjid on several occasions. He has always been quiet and almost isolated, as if not wishing to speak or be spoken to. Each time he has been in a different garb: a dash-dash with either the white turban, a white skull cap, or a red and white kifyah, or a militaristic looking shirt and trousers, but always with his untrimmed beard. He would constantly be saying prayers or reading Quran, as if not willing to exchange his divine association for mere human association. He looked unapproachable, as if, should one go to him for

discussion, he would answer "I don't have time." Tonight he appears almost as a totally different person, like a sudden eruption from a dormant volcano. Perhaps that long self isolation was intended for making others eager to hear him -- a Zarathustra just out of his cave, descending the mountains to reform the mortals. His name is Qais al-Kalbi. He has determined to give a speech on Islam and has gathered a group of about 30 men around him. The speech is in Arabic. Among the Shi'ites and non-Arabs present is the cab driver Abbas, who cannot speak Arabic. Nevertheless, he pretends to be listening carefully. The issue soon comes to center upon Shi'ite/Sunni differences and disputes.

"Shi'ites are unbelievers. They believe Ali and Fatimah also received revelations. Their leaders have huge turbans but no faith. None of them say their prayers properly. I used to be a Shi'ite myself. Then I read the Shi'ite books and I found much stupidity and many mistakes. I became a Sunni, and so did all my family except my father, whom I disowned." The focus suddenly changed into politics, specifically concerning the Iraq/Iraq war. He condemns both Saddam and Khomeini as warmongers, responsible for the bloodbath. An Egyptian raises his voice, "You are not supposed to talk about such things. The Sunnis and the Shi'ites are brothers. Minor disputes should not be stirred up and old wounds should be let to heal. We should preserve

our unity." His comment is followed by that of the Iraqi Kurd, Feraydun, "This is hypocrisy. It is not right to say these things in the house of God." He later tells me that he has gone to the office to complain about this rabble rousing "hypocrite" and the trouble he might cause. "He is a spy of Saddam." Qa is ends his discussion at this point. Qa have a mixed feeling about him. For a moment I consider that he must be merely a believer with good intentions. He is simply arguing that right is right and a true Muslim should never compromise his religion because of politics or something else. Another moment I reflect that all that self-imposed seclusion ending in such sudden socialization must reveal something else. He has perhaps thought, "People have seen my piety; and now they are ready to blindly follow what I say." I remember having read some literature about one of the founders of Shaikhiah, who had resided in one of the big mosques of my hometown in pietistic seclusion, in order to attract a following by playing hard to get. There is a natural temptation to desire what is prohibited. Many other examples of this sort of reverse psychology come to my mind, and I say to myself, "Ahah, all that was a means to achieve this end." I am not alone in these mixed feelings. There are others who say, "Only God knows what is in the chest of the people." The choice is between following the commandment of Islam that one should hold a favorable

opinion of his Muslim brother and the pragmatic human precaution that one should beware of human hypocrites. Having a good opinion about a hypocrite is sheer naivete. With a few exceptions, everyone keeps his opinion about Qais to himself. Backbiting is considered like eating the flesh of one's dead brother.

Sunday, Ramadhan 24

Muhammad Barakat has returned from Malaysia. "The recitation went very well. I had a good time. First prize went to a Philipino and second to an Iranian. Among the females, first prize went to a Malaysian." The Sunday picnic today is very similar to that of the previous Sunday.

Tonight at 6:00 I attend a weekly program in which non-Arabs, mostly Pakistani, participate. These speeches are in English. A member of the board reads and explains the rituals of prayer, fasting, etc., their do's and don't's. Then a few verses are written on the board and translated word for word. Some take notes. Announcements follow, and then Azan. (call for prayer) This Sunday, a part of the program is about the ritual of Eid al-Fitr. "Ramadhan is leaving us and thank Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, we have so far been successful. Meanwhile preparations are being made, Insha Allah, for Eid al-Fitr. It will either be Saturday or Sunday, depending on the moon. The prayer will be held in Albert Thomas Hall, the doors will be open at eight, Insha

Allah. The prayer will begin at 8:45. Please be punctual. May Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, bless all of you."

I go into the prayer hall for the Maghrib and Isha prayers, and when I come back out, I discover that my shoes have again - stolen or lost. I am not especially uncomfortable going the rest of the night barefoot, but I wonder how many more times this will happen.

After, it is twelve midnight and the recitation of Quran has just ended. Qais al-Kalbi delivers his second lecture. He is eager to gather a crowd around him to involve more people. Before he begins, an Egyptian man asks Qais if they may speak privately for a minute. Later I learn that Qais is warned about me. "He is an Iranian, a Shi'ite, and he speaks Arabic. Be careful so there will not be any trouble." Qais returns and asks everyone to gather around. In a two hour speech he covers a wide range of topics. First he tells a couple of stories about his strategy for propagating Islam, namely affirming that a good propagator must have the ability to arouse enthusiasm in the potential convert in order to carry a good and sound argument and to be able to avoid harsh words. Among the topics discussed are:

- Proving the existence of God;
- refuting Marx and particularly his notion of dialectics;
- Refuting Christianity and particularly the doctrine of the

trinity;

--The miracles of Quran and their "scientific" contexts:

Quran and modern biology, Quran and modern physics, Quran and modern oceanography, Quran and modern astronomy . . . ;

--Ridiculous passages and phrases of the Bible, with proof that it cannot be the word of God or even of a sane mortal.

--The issue of Palestine, with proof that the land no longer belongs to the children of Israel;

--Condemnation of Yasser Arafat, George Habash, and the rest of the "non-Muslims" whose attempts to liberate Palestine are bound to fail;

-- (mention that all the above topics are covered extensively in his book.)

During his speech, he often looks at me suspiciously. When I raise my finger to ask a question, he pleasantly asks me to postpone it, and I do. Immediately after the speech he asks if anyone has recently had a dream that he might interpret. Her interprets for several people. When I try to interject to ask a question, he says he has to pray. "We will do it some other time." It is near dawn, and some of us sit to eat with Shaikh Barakat. The topic is again the recitation contest.

Tuesday night, Eve of Ramadhan 27

Tonight is again perhaps the night of Qadr, but speculation is much stronger that it is tonight than on the

eves of the 21st, 23rd, and 25th. It is believed that on this night the whole of the Quran descended to the Bait al Izzah (House of Glory) situated in the heaven of earth, to be gradually and randomly revealed unto the heart of the prophet of Islam. Many of those who have come for the breaking of fast, for Maghrib and Isha prayers will stay for the particular ceremony tonight. First the Marghib prayer commences as usual, then the breakfast dinner, then the Isha prayer, then the Tarawih prayer, and finally the recitation of Quran, which tonight will have a very special character, as it will be recited in its totality. Considering it must be recited melodiously and distinctly, it is quite a task in respect to time. An ancient technique for accomplishing this task in one night is to be employed. Quran is divided into 30 Juz', each of which in the form of a small volume. Twenty-nine of these are passed out to different people, each of whom recites his allotted portion, a democratic division of labor, and this is all done simultaneously. The masjid sounds like a beehive, each bee humming a different tune, yet all equally heavenly. One is reminded of the narration about the early Muslims, whose recitation in the mosque sounded like bees, or maybe of the martyrs of Karbala on the night before their death. The thirtieth Juz' of Quran, which includes the earliest revelations, but usually appears at the end of Quran, is recited last and

differently. Everyone takes a turn in reciting a surah from it. A great deal of devotional singing occurs between each surah and the next. Then everyone chants the particular prayer which celebrates the completion of the recitation of Quran. All this takes place inside the prayer hall with Barakat leading the ceremony.

Outside the masjid, the Iraqi Qa is is sitting at a table with his followers, and they remind me of Jesus and his disciples, perhaps at the last supper, except that there is no meal or even appetites, and of course no Roman soldiers. I also sit at their table. Abdul Rahman has brought a tape recorder to record his speech. Qais looks at me with suspicious eyes, as if it were Jesus looking at Judas. Again he has been warned to watch out for this "staunch Shi'ite who knows a lot." The topic of the conversation is women and particularly hijab. I feel that we, the disciples of this prophet, are consuming a ritual meal of the dead flesh of women. (I have transcribed this speech from a copy of the tape and it appears in Appendix B.)

The recitation of Quran and Qais's speech end at almost the same time. During his speech, several people have approached me and said I was wasting my time listening to this man on the night of power. "There are better things to do." At 2:00 we have an excellent meal: stuffed grape

leaves, stuffed squash, lamb soup, salad, and Coke. Immediately after eating I join Qais, who is sitting alone. For the past three days I have sensed that he wanted to talk to me privately. I give him the opportunity now, and he opens up. "I am from Basrah, from an ex-Shi'ite family. I am a lawyer. In 1976 Saddam put me in jail." (I assume he wanted to ally himself to me by presenting himself as enemy of my enemy.) "One night I had a crucial dream. I was in paradise and I saw four men sitting and there was a woman whose whole body was covered entirely in black. She dropped a handkerchief on my lap. I awoke and asked my uncle to interpret it for me. Next day I had a debate with a group of Sunnis and I decided to convert. This was the fulfillment of my dream. The four men were the four grand caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthmn, and Ali, may God be pleased with them all; the woman was Aisha, widow of the prophet and mother of believers. In my Shi'ite life I had to curse the first three and the lady every time I heard their names, and I had to worship only the fourth, which is the wrong religion. Thanks to this truthful dream, which was itself on the level of divine revelation, I found the truth. Now no one can take my faith away from me. All my family, with the exception of my father, converted. You see, Cl-Manamu Qabl al-Kalam (dream comes before -- or is more revealing than -- words). By the way, who are these Iranians who sit

with you? Don't you sense danger from them?" I tell him, "First of all, they are not fanatics. And secondly, they don't understand Arabic. As far as it concerns me, I am quite open and enthusiastic to learn. One can never learn enough." Qais suggests that we should sometime have more private conversations. "Not everyone has the capacity to break his shell and open to new worlds." I told him, "Don't worry, you can tell me anything." At this point someone interrupts the conversation. He wants to sell plane tickets to Qais. So we end the conversation for now.

Wednesday Night, Eve of Ramadhan 28

About 12:00 midnight, Hitaji Aziz and I arrive on the premises. Qais and his disciples are sitting around a table. Qais is speaking on the rights of the mother in Islam. "If a man's mother is not pleased with him, he will not go to heaven. If your mother does not approve of your wife, you should divorce that wife and get another." At almost every sentence, a man among the disciples interrupts and distracts him. Qais says, "Once upon a time a companion came to the apostle.."

-Which companion was it?

--It doesn't make a difference.

--Of course it does; I want to know which companion it was.

--Okay I will tell you later.

--No, tell me now!

--Please brother, may Allah bless you, let me speak. The man is obviously drunk. I am amazed at the tolerance Qais and the disciples show toward him. At any minute, I expect Qais to order 80 lashes for this man for his impudence and immorality, but he doesn't. The issue abruptly changes from "mother" to that of wine, the Umm al-Kaba'ir (mother of all sins). The man again interrupts: "I disagree. I drink, but I bother no one. I am a Muslim from the city of Hama (**) in Syria. I belong to the Muslim Brotherhood. (Everyone exclaims, Cstaghfir Allah). But don't mistake me, brother, I am not a Shi'ite. I am a good Sunni Muslim." Someone interjects, "A good Muslim does not drink. Intoxication is the root of all big sins." "Not all," he replies. "Adultery is worse, because in adultery you rape somebody, but by drinking you don't rape anybody." Qais says to someone, "How is he going to fast tomorrow? I hope he is sober by then." The man answers, "As a matter of fact, I was fasting today. I broke my fast with some scotch." Everyone is incensed, but no one does anything, perhaps fearing the police. The drunkard is quite calm and confident. "I'm not bothering anybody. I'm sitting here minding my own business, learning. I'm open to any logical argument, but you cannot feed me with just anything you wish." Qais then stops his lecture.

Hitaji, who has joined a group of women on the other side of the courtyard, looks impatience. I go to her and ask if she wants to leave. "Yes; I have a lot of mixed feelings associated with such places."⁴⁴

Friday, Ramadhan 29

The last Friday of the month of Ramadhan is called Jum'at al Wida (Farewell Friday). Perhaps it is an analogy on Hajjat al-Wida (the final Pilgrimage) of Muhammad shortly before his death. There is also the analogy that "Friday prayer is the hajj of the poor."⁴⁵ This Ramadhan encompassed five Fridays, and both the beginning and end of the sacred month were marked by Jum'ah. Today there are words of farewell in the air. There is much talk about Eid prayer, which, in accordance with the moon, will be held tomorrow. "How fast Ramadhan passed by us!" Muhammad Naseem is scheduled to lead the Jum'ah prayer. The crowd is large enough to occupy the entire prayer hall, but yet less than the overflowing multitude expected.

Highlight of the first sermon: . . . "Farewell Ramadhan; farewell Ramadhan; farewell! Brothers and sisters, tomorrow is our graduation day. Some will get an 'A'; and some, God forbid, will get an 'F'; a bad student knows he is a bad student." Analogy is made to the judgement day. "On that day, we are given our files and told "Read it and be judge on thyself."⁴⁶ So brothers and sisters, let us think about

that day." Tears drop from his eyes . . .

Highlights of the second sermon: . . . "If someone tells you, "Someone has brought a few moonrocks to exhibit, and on them are some strange inscriptions. To view them you must pay \$1.00" You would be so curious to go and see this novelty. There is the very word of Allah in the Quran, and we are not so curious about it. This is the greatest divine gift man has ever received. Why don't we read, try to understand, and appreciate it?"

The prayer ends; . . . fliers, fliers, fliers: 5 Star Groceries announces its special prices . . . A & N Automotive and Body Shop: 10% off . . . "Imam urges Ulama to lead masses against the regimes and superpowers" . . . Granny's Buffet invites everyone to a complete Eid program from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., to conclude with Mahfili Nagma Shi'ra Va Musiqi (party of poetry and music) . . . Eid ul Fitr feast, July 1, 1984, in Sunnyside Park . . . "Visit Shamiana Sweet in Houston" . . . There is no Iranian newspaper table. Rumor has it that they have all attended a demonstration today. Today has been declared by Khomeini as "The day of Jerusalem." There are demonstrations in four major cities of this continent, Washington D.C., Detroit, Toronto, and San Francisco.

Saturday, Shawwal 1, Eid al Fitr

At 7:45 a.m. the doors open at Albert Thomas Hall

downtown and people begin to file in. Pakistanis, Arabs, and Indians generally wear the clothes of their respective traditional cultures, as if intentionally flaunting their ethnic distinctions. Everyone has brought a small carpet, blanket, or sheet. Boxes for the collection of Zakat and Zakat al Fitr, as well as donations to the building of the new masjid, are set up in the hallway with big signs posted. As people pour in and each tries to grab the most desirable spots on the floor, Shaikh Barakat begins the chant of Takbirat. Everyone is encouraged to chant. The people sit in rows, facing Mecca. As always, the women are restricted to the back. In the middle of Barakat's chanting, a member of the board takes the microphone abruptly and makes some announcements. "Brothers and sisters, if you have not paid your Zakat al Fitr, you should do so before the prayer, \$3.00 per person. The prayer will begin at 8:45. Please straighten your lines. The brothers distributing pamphlets, please stop doing so now. Distribute them after the prayer. That's it for now." The microphone is handed back to Barakat, who appears somewhat perturbed by the rude interruption. The chanting recommences. The words to the chant are displayed both in Arabic script and English transliteration. People continue to crowd in and the chatter and noise are increasing. The man sitting beside me takes out his checkbook and conspicuously writes a thirty

dollar check, as if to prove to me his devotion. "Last year," he explains, "I paid twenty seven dollars, but this year there was a new birth in the family; so Ma sha Allah." I ask, "You have eight children?" He answers proudly in the affirmative. The box for Zakat al Fitr is passed and some put money in it. Once again Barakat is interrupted by a different member of the board. "Brothers and sisters, Salam Alaikum and Eid Mubarek to all of you. Every year, Alhamdu Lillah, it's getting better and better. Be it known that ISGH depends only on your generosity and participation. It is independent. It is not subject to the rule of any earthly government. ISGH is trying to provide larger and better programs year after year . . ." Someone in the middle of the crowd stands and shouts, "It is not the time for these announcements. Let the people chant Takbirat." He is ignored. After the announcements, the microphone is given back to Barakat, who seems to be getting angrier. Ten minutes later, yet another member of the board takes his turn at the announcements. He has a heavy Pakistani accent, a manly voice, and a serious face. "Brothers and sisters, if you have not paid yet, please do so. Three dollars per person for sins. Please. Very soon Said Jum'ah will lead the prayer. Straighten your lines. Your chanting is not loud enough, such that it shakes . . . (he points to the ceiling or sky)." The chanting begins anew. The Pakistani

sitting on my other side tells me, "God, did you hear that man? He has a frightening face. He reminds me of Zia of Pakistan." I smile and he continues, "I'm not kidding you. Each of these guys may be a powerful political figure in the future. Now they are merely practicing."

It is 8:44 and there is no room to swing a cat. There seem to be at least 4000 people. Yet this is actually a small number compared to the total Muslim population of Houston. The exact figures are difficult to obtain. There are said to be some 15,000 Iranians alone in Houston, and goodness knows how many from all the Muslim lands combined; but how many of these are to be considered Muslims -- "true Muslims?" And how many would come to participate in this event? Said Jum'ah stands to lead the prayer. There is a microphone attached to his collar. He explains, "Brothers and sisters, there will be seven Takbirat in the first unit and five Takbirat in the second. Then there will follow the Khutbah (sermon) which is a part of the prayer." His hands are raised to his ears. "Alahu Akbar." Everyone follows. After the Takbirat there is dead silence. He continues with the second unit. Immediately after the prayer, he delivers the sermon: ". . . The action of the fast is Ramadhan is raised, according to the prophet, peace be upon him, to between the earth and heaven. When the believer pays the Zakat al Fitr the fasting is accepted by God . . ." The

sermon is a list of religious concerns, ending with a list of the important projects of the community: the building of the new masjid and additional satellites, the establishment of a private radio station to propagate Islam . . .

Slides are to be shown, but first a few more announcements by a board member. There will be a bazaar in the afternoon which everyone already knows about. Many signs are displayed on the walls to direct our attention to various extraneous pursuits. In my hunger, I approach the table offering "Sikh-kebabs" (sic). The merchant is an Indian. At three dollars a piece, they are a ripoff. When I complain to my friends, "Three dollars for such a scrawny thing?"; one explains, "Sikhs are difficult to capture, being gathered in the Golden Temple. Do you expect their flesh to be as cheap as goat meat?" I do not laugh. It is easier to joke about bloodshed at such a distance. But this is also no time to be overly serious. It is, after all, a celebration.

There is a lot of handshaking, hugging, and kissing going on. People are pouring out as quickly as they poured in. A few pro-Khomeini pamphleteers show up and magazines and the latest declaration of Imam are distributed. They have just returned from Washington D.C., where yesterday there was a celebration of the "Worldwide Day of Jerusalem." They were proud of having succeeded in burning an Israeli

flag in Public. (**) Also on various tables are Islamic books, foods, clothing, and of course, good old Coca-Cola. A few children lose and find their parents with the aid of the p.a. system. For the latecomers, the prayer is repeated with about one hundred participants. It is the beginning of a new month. Yesterday fasting was required, but today it is forbidden. Such is the celebration of the end of the holy month of Ramadhan.

Saturday night, Shawwal 1

At 8:00 p.m. I go to the masjid and I only find six people. This is a big disappointment after the activity of the last month. The Palestinian Abraham says, "Look how people appear and disappear." The Iraqi Qais comments, "Today they can be excused, they were tired." After the prayer, we gather around Qais and he tells us of his experience in the masjid during Ramadhan." They got suspicious of me: "Who is this guy who claims he is married but resides at the masjid? He must be a spy from Iraq or Kuwait (!) Where does he earn his money? You see, everyone got suspicious and thought I was a spy or an agitator." It is obvious Qais does not receive much sympathy from anywhere. I want to break the ice and comfort him, so I say, "Well, if you do things for God, and I'm sure you do, you should accept the consequences. After all, Jesus, according to the Christians, was crucified for his beliefs.

Ashes and trash were poured on the head of the prophet Muhammad. They even broke his teeth in Taif. And so many other things, you know what happened to all the great prophets. You are a reader of Quran. Do not forget the case of Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, who was poisoned by the very Muslims he attempted to help reform for a better life." This speech cheers him up. I have been introduced to him as an enemy; now in me he finds a friend and ally. The others keep silent. They are not sure who or what Qais is. As I have mentioned before, Qais has already purchased his plane tickets. A few days after buying them, he informs me that he changed his mind. "Brothers here need me, so I am going to stay." Several days after my last discussion with him on Shawwal 1, Qais is nowhere to be found. He has failed to carry out his mission. I ask someone about him, for I had planned to conduct an interview with him, and I am told, "He left for good, Insha Allah."

Tuesday Night, July 10

It is 10:30 p.m. Hassan and I arrive on the premises of the Islamic Society of Greater Houston for the last time. The doors are locked and barred, the lights are off, and there is not a soul around, not even the ghost of a maintenance man. I wonder if for everything there is a passing season." Islam was born lonely, alien; and so it shall return, lonely, alien." Thus spoke Muhammad.

Footnotes

- 1- The lunar month cannot be more than 30 days.
- 2- Quran 2/185.
- 3- Quran 97.
- 4- The first transitional government of the Islamic Republic of Iran was formed by him through the firman (decree) of Khomeini.
- 5- Quran 2/275-8; 3/130; 3/161.
- 6- This is evidently dissimulation on the part of Mr. Buzdar. One can easily observe the division of Shi'ites and Sunnis in the community. The former, as I have mentioned in the paper, have their obvious differences but follow the very significant Shi'ite practice of "dissimulation" (Taqiyah), attempting to "play Roman when in Rome." For example, at the time of Tarawih prayer, they all disappear in order not to commit a "forbidden" act.
- 7- That is, fifteen lunar years, which is the Muslim age of majority for males. Women reach the age of majority at nine.
- 8- The time one is to stop eating and drinking.
- 9- The time of breaking fast.
- 10- Muslim Student Association Persian Speaking Group.
- 11- Circumcision of women is recommended in Islam but not required. In some Muslim countries they still circumcize women, particularly in Sudan.
- 12- Quran 6/90; 11/51; 36/21; 42/23; 52/40; 68/46.
- 13- See for example the exegetical commentaries on 4/32, Tabarsi, vol. 111, p. 40; Ibn Kathir, vol. p. 382; Tusi, vol. III, p. 184; Makarim, vol. III, p. 362.
- 14- See Keddie, pp. 295-307.
- 15- Taleqani's last sermon.
- 16- See Algar, pp. 4, 56 and Fischer's criticism (p. 6) of this doctrine. Both are right, each in a different context.

17- See Algar.

18- The nullifiers of fast are as follows: Nine things void a fast. First, eating and drinking. Second, copulation. Third, masturbation, which is what one does to himself which causes the exit of semen from him. Fourth, ascribing lies to God and to the Prophet and those who sat after him, salutations to them all. Fifth, access of dense fumes to the throat. Sixth, immersing the entire head under water. Seventh, a sustained state of ejaculation and menstruation and childbirth until the azan of morning. Eighth, application of an enema using things which flow. Ninth, vomiting. And the precepts of these will be said in future problems. (Khomeini, prob. 1572)

19- See Paknizad, p. 122. In 14 A.H. Uman ordered that Tarawih prayer be performed publicly and he himself said: "This is an innovation; but it is a good innovation."

20- He is the Al-Azhar appointed religious consultant Shaikh Zahir al-Zoghbi, to whom I am introduced later.

21- Quran 31/1.

22- I found it intriguing and even curious that the Iranians attending the masjid were of two major categories: "pro-Khomeini" and "cab-drivers." A third category may be said to be "ex-cab drivers"!

23- Sometimes I participate in the Persian and Arabic hours at KPFT Radio.

24- We both know we are speaking of Iran-Iraq.

25- The Muslim Iraqi soldiers are constantly being called by the Iranian state controlled media "Kuffar-e-Saddam" (the unbelievers following Saddam). In the view of Khomeini and his followers, the Iraqi regime is a Zionist regime. Likewise the Iraqi authorities accuse Khomeini of having bought arms from Israel.

26- The literal translation of Ayatollah.

27- One of the four major collections of hadith and a source of jurisprudence as compiled by al-Kulayni (d. 328 A.H.).

28- Shi'ite laymen usually follow the decrees of a grand expert of jurisprudence. The "following" is referred to as taqlid (imitation). By invoking Rumi I attempt to

make Hamid understand that I do not practice taqlid. Rumi says: Khalq ra Talideshan bar bad dad Ey do Sad La'nat bar in Taqlid bad. -- "People were gone with the wind due to following; may two hundred damnations be upon following." Hamid does not catch my point.

29- Khomeini, p. 1, prob. 1: A Moslem's belief in the fundamentals of religion must be based upon reason and he may not practice imitation in regards to fundamentals of the religion, that is, accepting someone else's statement without reasoning. But in regards to the precepts (ahkam) of the religion he must either be an Expert (Mujtahed) and arrive at those precepts by reasoning or he imitates certainly from an that is, he acts according to his orders. Or, he must practice his duties so cautiously such to be certain of having practiced according to one's duties. For example, he refrains from practicing an act which is considered unlawful by some Experts and not unlawful by others and practices an act which is considered obligatory by some and recommended by others. Thus it is obligatory for those who are not Experts and who cannot exercise caution to imitate an Expert . . . A Moslem must have certainty in the fundamentals of the religion and in the precepts of the religion he must either be an Expert and arrive at those precepts by reasoning or imitate an Expert.

30- A rival of Khomeini now under house arrest.

31- Of course I did not mean this! It was merely a battle cry to scare him off.

32- Now Hamid is trying to convey something indirectly: first there is Bayyannah and then there is "iron", i.e. sword. If bayyannah fails, the sword steps in. (See Quran 57/25). He simply says that the time for stabbing me may or will come if I do not submit to his reasoning.

33- Tirmidhi, vol. VI, p.13; Musnad, vol. II, pp. 237-8, 329; also Graham, Divine Word and Prophethood in Early Islam, the Netherlands: Mouton and Co., 1977, p.122.

34- Wasa-il, vol. V, p.8.

35- Quran 26.

36- Quran 26/223-6.

37- Quran 26/227.

38- For details see Iqbal's article in the magazine New

Era, 1916.

39- Quran 22/38.

40- Quran 49/12.

41- Bid'at (innovation) versus Sunnah (tradition). The former has a bad connotation for a Muslim. It is haram (forbidden).

42- Fischer, p. 242.

43- Abrahamian attributes his categories to Shariati, Merip Reports, Jan. 1982, pp. 26-29.

44- See appendix A.

45- Wasa-il, vol. V, p. 5.

46- Quran 17/14.

47- The Pakistani grand scholar who died approximately five years ago and who was responsible for Zia coming to power.

48- Quran 26/223-26.

49- Quran 4/34.

50- Quran 2/27.

51- Quran 4/34.

52- Everyone agrees a Muslim man is allowed to have four permanent wives. The Shi'ite allow additional temporary marriages. There are not, of course, many individuals who have two wives, let alone four or more. As Hitaji quite brilliantly indicates, the function of mutah in the U.S. is different. It is a sexual release for the brothers who are here for a few years and cannot afford to have a permanent wife. The Sunnis consider this sheer adultery, and some have asked me during my field work if I have ever done mutah. As far as how the blacks became familiar with mutah, it is my theory they knew about it before the Iranian revolution. But I am not sure of the actual origin.

53- Quran 2/223.

Appendix A

Since the beginning of this project, I was eager to conduct an interview with Muslim woman in attendance at this masjid. The attempt failed, due to strict segregation. Nevertheless, I decided to interview a female ex-participant, namely Hitaji Abdul Aziz, who speaks for herself in the following pages. She amazed me by her consciousness as a Muslim woman, aware of the oppression of women in Muslim communities. She no longer attends the masjid and explains why. The interview took place beginning at 10 p.m., Thursday, Ramadhan 21.

"For a long time, I've been always searching, okay, as far as a god-force, when I was a little girl, I was very Christian, and when I was a teenager I wanted to be a nun, fanatically, a nun. And it was something about inner peace that I'd never had; that I was searching and I knew there were answers and what-not, so I went to various churches and various organizations and there were always Muslims around on the street, on the corners in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where I grew up. And there were a lot of old Muslims there who used to practice Islam in the twenties; and they used to have to have the mosque in a basement for fear of oppression, being Muslim. So I was always around it, but never really knew that much about it, and I grew into being a cultural nationalist in the community, and I was doing a

lot of work with alternative school systems, teaching black children and canvassing and registering the vote -- the whole thing -- feeding kids . . . And I was like in the tenth grade then. And I was pushing for black studies in schools.

One day it was really strange, I was walking down the street, and this brother came out on the corner and started calling the Azan for prayer . . . I didn't know what he was saying, but if I reflect, it must have been Maghrib -- the sun was going down -- I can remember the sun right in my face -- it was low -- and I was living in a commune. I was eighteen years old, and I was walking down the street, getting ready to go to a meeting, and he came out of the mosque and called the people to prayer, and something told me to run to the mosque. So I went to my house and I put down all my papers, and I ran to the mosque. And they were getting ready to make Salat (prayer), they were making Wudhu (ablution). The Imam was there and I just sat there, I was like, scared, really afraid, and then they started explaining Islam to me and at the same time I met a Muslim man who wanted to marry me...like immediately -- I don't know what was happening. with that -- but anyway, he had a lot of influence -- his name was Hafiz -- on me and Islam, and he taught me about how to make Salat and explained things and we got married. And then he soon became the Imam

of that mosque, the first Muslim mosque in Pittsburgh, and from then on it was just learning and reading, studying Maududi⁴⁷ from Pakistan, working in the mosque; and I had another teacher from Libya. He was a good teacher, and we lived in the Islamic community then. And we started an Islamic school, so I became very active.

But my first real important transition was when I joined the Islamic Party of North America. The Imam there was Musaffa Uddin. That was in Washington, D.C. And it was more political. It was more than just praying, more than just reading Quran or fasting in Ramadhan, you know. I had been influenced by the Tablighi Jamat from India, too. But I was not satisfied with the Tablighi Jamat: it was too Sufi-type, and I was saying, 'This is not reality. We cannot sit here and Dikr for like three hours and expect to help the community. So I still miss that part of the Nationalist community; and I left all my nationalism behind when I became Muslim, alright, threw everything away. And I was writing and reading poetry then. I stopped writing; I threw all my poetry away. I destroyed it, because I thought and was told that that was not the right thing for a Muslim woman to do.⁴⁸ So at the same time, I went into seclusion, purda, put on the hijab, okay, and that was from the influences of Maududi, the purda and the laws, the jurisprudence laws on women in dress and women in seclusion,

the role of women, . . . And it was influenced by the Tablighi Jamat, very strict on women. And so I functioned in purda for about ten years, and was part of the Islamic Party in North America, and we gave Da'wah (invitation) and tabligh (propagation) and I taught first grade in our school in Washington, D.C. and we had a very large community -- the school, we had our own cab company, health food store, bookstore -- we basically laid it out in Washington, D.C. And I liked it because they were starting to mix politics. Muslims and non-Muslims went to our school.

But I always had a hard time fitting in as far as the roles of women and the role of wife and mother. So there was always a conflict, I always asked too many questions. Like when we went to study, I would always take all my Hadith -- nine volumes of Hadith! -- and no one else would bring their books because they would just do what Imam told them to do. And I would look up and I was saying, 'This doesn't make sense' you know, and 'Answer this'. And there was a lot of resentment because I could not be just a blind follower. Even though, as I look back now, I was a blind follower. I would basically do anything the Imam told me to do, because I had faith in the Imam. This is what the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad said, "Obey your Imam." But the Islamic leadership in this country is oftentimes somewhat corrupt. It's more so a dictatorship. And it's

more a dictatorship when it comes to Muslim women.

M.--To which organization was your main connection? Was it Jama'at Islami of Pakistan, Wallace D. Muhammad, or what?

H.-- Okay, I was never connected to Wallace D. Muhammad; I never belonged to a temple. I never believed in what Elijah Muhammad taught as far as Islam was concerned. I never believed that white people were devils. I was always uncomfortable with that. At that time Wallace D. Muhammad was not a part of his father. He had split, because he disagreed with his father's teachings on Islam. And as I recall, Wallace D. Muhammad was just basically a Sunni Muslim. But his father wasn't, and there was always this controversy between him and his father. But after Elijah Muhammad died, Wallace D. Muhammad took his place and changed it up, but that's something else we can cover. I still have disagreements with that. But I was basically always just orthodox Muslim, following Maududi, and being heavily influenced by Tablighi Jamat from Pakistan, and India, you know, real strict, but nothing connected with Elijah Muhammad or anything like that.

M.--Could you go into some of these questions you mentioned for which there were not satisfying answers?

H.--I guess most of my questions were around what I was supposed to be about as a woman . . . strict obedience to the husband. There was a lot of weight put on it if you

disobeyed your husband, you would not go to paradise. And I could not understand that; and I have yet to get a real logical answer as to why that is true. And I saw a lot of women being mentally abused because of this. It was like women were inferior. You know, all the parts of the Hadith, or maybe the way men interpret the Hadith, or whatever, meant that we could not intellectually inspire as human beings, because all we were supposed to be doing was having babies, or being the wives of one man. And that was like our occupation. And I would always ask why. Why can't they stay home with the babies? Why can't they do this or that? And then parts of the Quran were taken and used to justify beating women. There is a lot of abuse in Muslim communities in America, and from what I hear, in the world. And I question that. For ten years I was a battered wife. And I questioned that, and I often got beat because of my mouth. And all my Muslim women friends were battered, too; but they weren't brave enough to question it. They would just hide or cry or take it, and I just knew that there was something better than this. I was completely dissatisfied with it.

M.--When you approached Islam, what was your expectation, and then what was the reality?

H.--My expectations were that I was looking for spiritual peace. When I took shahadah I was satisfied with that, the

inner self, you know, finding the ~~towhid~~, the oneness of God -- I could get up on that, I could understand that, and that made me feel good inside. I still go along with that. I still believe there is a god-force. Everybody has their different name. But the reality was that I was female, and that brought on a whole new level of oppression for me. That was the reality, and that took away from my aspirations of spiritual peace. That took away from that and it was like a nightmare.

M.--Let's face the reality. You are a woman, and women bear children. Men cannot even get pregnant. I could give you a long list of objective differences. Men and women have two different functions. How can they be equal?

H.--I don't have any qualms about the way my body is made. It's okay and I'm very proud of that, very at peace with my body, my femaleness, my periods, breast milk, children, you know, I've had babies, and that's okay, I think that's a blessing, because I'm able to bear the future in my body. That's okay. But because of my physical makeup, that because of what I have to do physically, I happen to be weaker than the average man, physically. And so women are taken advantage of on that level. And because of the way the capitalistic system is made up and the way Islamic social laws are written, we have to take the backseat. And that doesn't have anything to do with my body. Because how

I'm built should not bring that kind of second-class citizenship within the Islamic community. That's my problem right there. I don't understand that problem. There's no difference between my intellectual ability and your intellectual ability.

M.--Do you think women are like second-class citizens in Islam?

H.--Yeah, they are.

M.--Do you think men as far as women are concerned are somewhat hypocritical?

H.--Yeah. But I don't put the whole weight on men, because I see hundreds of women submitting to the submissive role because they blindly follow Islam. They read and they're afraid to question because they think if they are questioning they are going against Allah. But Allah has not said anything about you're not allowed to question anything. You're allowed to ask questions. He made us with the ability to be curious about things, so we should. But that fear and I had that fear, too -- will keep your mouth closed. You'll just do it. And I grew out of that. I started asking questions, because, logically, you know, Allah knows what's in your heart. He knows what's in your mind, so why be a hypocrite. But that took years of getting out of that for me. I was in severe seclusion -- during Ramadhan I never went out at all -- the clothes that we wore

were terrible. Some of the women in our community used to faint, they had so many clothes on. Face veils, you know, I wore a whole purda. It was very uncomfortable wearing all those clothes in the heat. It was totally ridiculous, and in some of our communities we had to wear gloves, and the social laws of sitting behind curtains all the time. Not being able to hear other people lecture on things, because we had to sit in a small room with fifty million children. So I noticed within the Muslim community that women are conditioned not to inspire for intellectual growth. They don't even listen to the lectures now. See, because they've been trained not to know, so they don't even go for it anymore. They just submit themselves and they're very unhappy.

M.--Islam is submission to the will of God. Suppose now a grand expert of jurisprudence comes to you and says, 'Hitaji, I didn't have anything to do with this law. This is not my discrimination against you. It is divine discrimination against you. God has willed that men and women have different functions. What would you say to this?

H.--First of all, I always give people due respect. But it is depending on what he is telling me I can and can't do if I agree or disagree. Now I understand the concept of ~~tewhid~~ and believe in the oneness of God and all that; I don't disagree with that. But the application is where I

disagree. You know, we are in a state of war in this country. Not just African people. Not just Muslim people. But people, the working class people in the country are under a state of genocide. And so the state of war and the state of peace in Islam is different, you function different. Historically, when women were functioning in a wartime situation, they wore short clothes. In various ~~hadiths~~ you can read during wars and stuff, women pulled their dresses up, because you can't fight with long clothes and veils and what-not. And it got to the point where women and men fought wars, too.

Even though a lot of times women did nursing and things like that, but it got to that point. And not just with Muslim people, but with all poor, working-class people, there was always a time in their revolutionary efforts when women were just as much in the forefront as men. So, if he told me that, right now in '84 that is the context I would put it in. I'm in a state of war. Once we're in a state of peace, then let's come back and talk about some other things that we can do.

M.--Against whom? Be more specific about this war.

H.-- The war? I guess basically against the capitalistic system. The system is a vampire. Khomeini set an example of what Muslim people are supposed to do as far as the capitalistic system is concerned. You are supposed to

fight, because oppression is worse than anything in Islam. So that's basically my everyday function. We are in a state of war. African people, poor people, Iranian people, whatever, are under the foot of capitalistic system, and why should we act as if this is not happening? Now when we are in a state of peace, then you can tell me to stay in the house, or you can tell me to wear this or that, and maybe I will reconsider. But not now; because it is very urgent that I be out in the front line, just like you. So that's the way I would weigh what he would say. Just because he's a shaikh or a great name in Islam does not have any effect on me at all.

M.--More specifically, how do you regard Khomeini altogether?

H.--At one time in my life, Khomeini was a very big hero to me. He did something to inspire Muslims. He told them that you are strong and you can fight these great powers that want to take your land or want to take your culture, or want to disrespect your religion. So Khomeini is real good on that level. But a lot of Muslims have not caught on to that. They should follow that inspiration. But as far as Khomeini and his attitude about non-Muslims, maybe I have a disagreement. You know, I'm in a transition stage as far as Imam Khomeini is concerned. I don't think that they look at people through a class analysis as much as they should. I

think that I have a disagreement with Muslims who conglomerate all non-Muslims as bad, the kafir or the unbelievers, because there are a lot of people who call themselves Muslims who are oppressors, like in Saudi Arabia and various other parts of the world. But as a whole, I think he did a good thing for Muslims. He stood up to America. He showed that he was not afraid. And he did let Muslim women get a step higher than anybody else. You know, those sisters in Iran, they can train; they were martyrs, and I admire that. During the revolution that was going on, they were not afraid. They went out on marches. They gave their life. And he let them do that.

M.--That is of course an honor to become a martyr. We see in almost every revolution, at the beginning, women come out. They confront the cannons and machine guns with their babies and kids and become martyrs. But as soon as the goal is achieved, they are pushed back into their houses to assume passive roles. Don't you think this happened in Iran?

H.--See, I don't know yet. I'm still looking at it. Okay, there is a great possibility that women are losing their revolutionary status that got Iran to where it is now. Now if they roll back the time on women, then I will be greatly disappointed. But I'm not sure yet. I have some friends in Iran and I'm trying to get over there so I can see for

myself. And then once I see with my own eyes then I can maybe formulate more what's happened to the status of Muslim women in Iran. So right now I'm just observing.

M.--How would you describe western women in comparison with Muslim women? Some see western women as just tools of consumerism.

H.--That' s true.

M.--Is this degrading for women?

H.--It is. Western women basically are prostitutes. You know, we focus on the woman on the corner, like on Westheimer, that is a prostitute -- we are all prostitutes. The western housewife is a prostitute. Instead of prostituting herself to many men, she just prostitutes herself to one man. You know, she gets his inheritance, she gets his security, she gets his protection . . . and that's a historical fact. That started a long time ago when the mode of production changed. Because at one time in our civilization, women were the top thing. They headed households; they made decisions; they were leaders. Children carried their names. And so this declined as the mode of production changed. So we're all prostitutes here. All of us. Me, everybody. And this is because we've had to sell ourselves to get protection, security, and what-not. So maybe the prostitutes that we call prostitutes are some of the most honest people, because there very out with the

way they have to survive. But we've all had to survive. Our mother's train us to be prostitutes, too. On one level or another, in America . . . and now, we have to connect that with Muslim women, too; because, I believe, at the present time, with the present day status of Muslim women, that they are prostitutes, too. I mean, because of the status of women in marriage.

M.--So you sell your body for protection?

H.--Yeah. And you call it keeping chaste.

M.--What is this transitional period? You sound inspired by Marxism. Are you turning your back on Islam?

H.--I don't think I'm turning my back against Islam. I believe in a god-force. I guess my propagation is different. I don't go out and say 'Everybody come to the mosque'. I don't do that anymore, because the mosque is not what people need. People need to know how to feed themselves. People need to know how to survive. People need to know their class interests. And the application of Islam as something that comes out of the mouths of the Imams is not doing that. So that's my transitional phase. Yes I do read a lot of Marxism. I've just started to study it. I do look at the way I do my work through a class analysis; and I look at Islam through a class analysis. And that's why I look at it the way I do. I don't think that Islam has failed the people. I think that Muslims have failed the

people.

M.--You remind me somewhat of Malcolm X, and he probably, following al-Afghani, would say that we must make a distinction between Muslims and Islam. So you think there is a difference between the real Islam and what comes out of the mouth of the clergy.

H.--Yeah, there's a class analysis in Islam. Islam does not have anything about color; and Islam is against interests and the way the capitalistic economic system is set up. Islam is basically a socialistic attitude. But when you start talking about 'these people can't do this' or 'these people can't do that because they're not Muslims', I disagree. Shariati read and studied Fanon, and he wasn't Muslim. But he did a lot of studying under that man and read a lot of his books; and I really admire that in Shariati, because he made an example that we can learn the truth from anybody.

M.--This surprises me that a woman from the United States has read an Iranian sociologist. Have you read his book, *Fatimah is Fatimah*, about the daughter of the prophet?

H.--I scanned through it. I haven't read a lot of his things in detail. When I was following what was happening in Iran, day by day, it was a great thing to go to the newspapers and to go to the mosque and discuss what was happening in Iran. That's how I got exposed to Shariati,

through friends that I had that live in Iran now. And when I read a little bit of what he was saying about Fanon -- and this is a black man he was talking about, too. That's another thing, because there is a lot of racism in the Muslim community. And most foreign Muslims do not look toward blacks for anything.

M.--You mean you have seen racism among Muslims here?

H.--Extreme racism.

M.--But I have been there and I haven't seen that.

H.--But you aren't black. I'll explain it like this.

Blacks who take up Islam have a tendency to imitate foreign Muslims, because they don't have any cultural roots, because of the cultural rape that they've gone through in this country. They have no identity. They're like empty cups. They fill themselves up with foreign Muslim ideologies and ways and concepts and lifestyles. They dress like foreign Muslims. I know you've seen some blacks do that. And so foreign Muslims come over here, and they take on the characteristics of white people to a certain extent, the way they feel about black people, the stories and stereotypes that they've heard before they came to this country. And they act out according to what they've been told. Everybody in the world sees the status of the European people as the ultimate. America -- let's go to America. I've seen foreign Muslims get so excited about coming to America. And

so they come to America with the racism that they have been prepared with. And so they treat us just like white people. You know, they're naive about it; they treat us just like white people. They think we're inferior. I've gone to the mosque here, the Eastside mosque, and I've gone to the Saudi Arabian mission for help, and they were saying, 'Go to your own people' and that's not Islam.

M.--You mean, go to black organizations and so forth?

H.--Black organizations. So that goes against class interests, because that's saying that you must be in another class or something; and that goes against Islam. Because color doesn't make any difference in Islam. It's not supposed to. But you don't see a lot of foreigners marrying black people. And there's a lot of things.

M.--Suppose you were given an all-expense paid, round-trip ticket to Iran. What would you most want to observe?

H.--The first thing I would look for, I would want to go among the women. I would want to see how their life has changed. I would want to see the support system that mothers have, so that they could still acquire the intellectual growth and education and training. You know, that's a big sign in a progressive country.

M.--Do you think a woman could be president?

H.--Yes, even though that's a contradiction to various hadiths.

M.--Well, I mean in your Islam, for we know these hadiths were written later, and people have made them up. But this issue of women in positions of leadership, such as judge.

H.--Well, Aisha, back in the times of prophet Muhammad, became an expert in jurisprudence. She used to teach everybody. She used to run the laws and . . .

M.--Well I don't think Islam says anything against women teaching . . .

H.--But can she be a judge. Yeah, I think a woman could be a judge. You know, there's no differences. Like, say, some of the qualifications for a person being able to judge are, like some hadiths say, are: you can't be angry, you can't be hungry, you can't be emotionally out of it to pass judgment. Well this same application for women. I mean, if she's in that state of mind, then she wouldn't pass judgment. The same thing for a man. What is the difference?

M.--Well, the basic notion is that women are emotional instead of rational. I have heard this from several Muslim scholars. What would you say about this?

H.--That's the way we've been trained, but I don't think it's the natural thing. I think that . . . yes there is a difference. A difference between men and women. There are some things that are different about us emotionally simply because we carry life in our bodies. It demands a different type of emotionalism, intuition, sensitivity. Maybe that

would make the best leader.

M.--Let's deal with the issue of parda. Suppose you went to Iran and you saw all women covered, but still they keep their positions. A woman can be a member of parliament, a professor in a university, a doctor, but she is still covered. Would you be bothered?

H.--No, I think every woman should do what she wants to do. It wouldn't bother me.

M.--Well that's different. But if it is a part of law and regulation?

H.--That would bother me, if it was forced. Because I think we should all have our own freedoms about the way we put clothes on our bodies. And it's like saying, 'If you don't wear x amount of clothes, then our environment is going to be bad . . . And that's like a real weak story. That's like saying, 'When women get raped, it's their fault. She must have been doing something type of attitude. Well there's a responsibility with the male, too. There's a hadith that says, 'Guard your gaze.' You know, you should have something inside you that controls you. My body was created a certain way. It's not my fault. There's no fault to it. But it's not my responsibility to keep people's feelings intact, you know. Because I have a thing about clothes. I think that basic western dress is prostitutorial looking. Real short clothes is prostitutorial looking

because of the way it's been hooked up in the society. The more flesh you show, the more control you have over men. The more status you have in society is the way you look. Like a 'blondes have more fun' type of thing. And we all get wrapped up in that, and men do too. So maybe if we all changed our values about what the female is about, we could dress sensibly and men wouldn't have to go ape. It's a social training that we have to break, and then we can be sort of in balance.

M.--How about men? Is it the same thing if they go around exposing their chests or wearing provocative clothes? Do women react the same way as they do?

H.--We all have the same feelings as far as what we are attracted to. Now, society and environment and values and culture and custom affects that. In some parts of Africa, women don't wear anything on their breasts. The men don't get exited with that, because that's a part of their environment, okay? But over here, if you go topless, it's a shame, because the breast is an erotic thing in America. So those are the differences we have to weigh out. So like in a mosque, women are attracted to the same things that attract men. So there's no difference. I think men should dress modest, just like women should. You make Salat right in front of us, like that, they parade like that right in front of the women. Because you see, when you make salat,

the men are in front and the women are in back; and the rationale is that, if the women were in front, the men could not concentrate, because when the women bent down, their rearends are all out. So it's best to keep them in the back. But when you have men coming in there looking like Elvis Presley or something, with their hair out and slick, and tight pants and stuff, well, what are we to do? Because our makeup is basically the same. So we're missing the point when we do that. It is internal character building that will keep us more in balance than just material that covers us up. Things go wrong, even when women are covered up. We've known women to get molested who were dressed in purda, okay. I've known women to get raped who had veils on. We're talking about America, too. In America, when you walk down the street with veils on and long-flowing clothes, it attracts attention. It doesn't play it down. That's another thing is that women don't question that. They don't say anything and then they have this fear because of the way they've been taught about Islam. You just accept it, because Allah would be displeased with you if you said that you were tired of seeing men come to the mosque in fine, tight clothes. You just don't say that as a Muslim woman. But men are allowed to say those things. They can tell you, 'Your jalaba is too short' or 'You need something on' or 'You shouldn't wear fingernail polish' or 'You shouldn't do

this or that'. They have the room to say that because of the social training not Islam. The social training, okay? But we don't do that because we are afraid. I think that the problem is not that we are afraid of Allah, we are afraid of people. And that is the biggest contradiction in the mosque. We do things because of what people think, and not because of what we think Allah is thing. And that's one thing I have gotten away from: dressing for people, praying for people, going to the mosque for people. There was one point in my life where I didn't wear but four colors, brown, grey, black, and white. Because it was immodest to wear prints or pink. I didn't wear jewelry because if your jewelry made noise, that was wrong. They called in the jinns and the devils and what-not. I didn't wear anything like that. No perfume. Because in hadith it says that men can wear perfume with scent and women can wear perfume with color. But in America we don't wear henna.

M.--What does that mean?

H.--Okay, perfume of color because perfume might have various definitions in various cultures. The perfume of the culture in Arabia was, like, henna or indigo, the whole hand was painted. But that's not our culture. So how's an African women in America supposed to relate to that. Well you go to the mosque and everything is smelling like musk is the men. You know what I'm saying? They're putting oil in

their beards, they're pouring it all over them, and you're trying not to notice this. But we have noses. So you turn where that scent is coming from, and how is that supposed to keep you modest? You see there's all these contradictions, and we've gotten Islamic fundamentals mixed up with cultures of various foreign Muslims; and we conglomerate all that and get very mixed up in America. I mean, if we could, some black people would ride camels down Main Street, 'because Prophet Muhammad did'. Blind following, you understand what I'm saying? So those things, because I understand national minorities must have a concept of their history, their land-space, their culture, their roots . . . I don't have the problem of imitating Pakistani women. I don't want to wear a sari. I don't want to be like Iranian women. Not because these Pakistani or Iranian women are bad, but because Allah created me African, and it is very good to be African. But because of America and the slave trade, the Negro was created and the African killed. And so I've gone through a whole political, cultural, social transition of reclaiming my national minority status, reclaiming my roots, reclaiming my African identity, and saying it's okay to be African and Muslim, and reclaiming the right to affirm my political growth, which is seeing Islam and everything else through a class analysis. But you know, studying Marxism, or studying Che, or socialism doesn't make me uncomfortable,

because we're in a progressive war, a cold war, now more so in America, but the whole world is turning over. And I don't want to miss out on that. So you've got to study everything, you know. And this has caused me great problems with the Muslim community, especially men, because they're very uncomfortable with assertive Muslim women, or assertive women in general. They're not used to that.

M.--Could you tell me about your marriage?

H.--I'm divorced now. That was really strange. I was in a battering situation, and the battering situation did not leave room for proper divorce procedures. We had to flee. And my husband decided he didn't want any parts of political struggle or the way that we felt about Islam. He just wanted to be to himself. He didn't want to be a husband, and he didn't want to be a father. So it sort of just annulled the whole relationship, since he wouldn't go through any sort of procedure. So I went through ⁵⁰ ~~Iddah~~, three months of Iddah, and the divorce was finalized even though in America, you just have to get an American legal divorce to satisfy their laws. But technically I'm divorced. I have three children and I am raising them.

M.--Is your husband paying for . . .

H.--No. I see him off and on. My husband is a victim of oppression in this country -- my ex-husband -- okay, and there are a lot of intricate designs that go into divorces

in this country. It's not the total fault of one person or both; we're victims of a system that is built against us as African people. And it's built against us and breaks the spirit of men. African men's spirits have always been broken. They have been trained not to be fathers. They have been trained not to be husbands. And this comes from slavery times, with the breeding system is that you go and you breed. You have no responsibilities except to the master. And you still find men with those values. And that the sad part about it is they don't even know why they act the way they act. But it is inherent in the marriage structure and male-female relationships. Because the system is built against us. We cannot make it. It is not made to have healthy families. The problem is raising the consciousness of men and women so they can understand that so they can recycle themselves and counteract this. And until we get to that level, our divorce rate is high; it will even get higher, because the system is getting worse. Repression is getting worse. There are more poor people every day. Hunger in America is growing. So of course this is going to effect not only the Muslim family in marriage, but the non-Muslim too. See, we've got a fantasy in this land that because you are a Muslim, you can escape. You know, that's just happening to the non-believers. Well the system doesn't care whether you are Muslim or non-Muslim; if

you are poor, working class, then you reap the seeds of oppression. And so when you find men who can't find stable jobs, and they've got kids to support, you find men who because of their color, they're kept out of some opportunities that other men who are white might have. They will take this out on whoever's close to them. And so that's where battering situations come from. They come from that and it is enhanced by the cultural teachings of Muslim communities. 'Oh, beat your wife lightly'. That's all the Muslim man needs to hear. So when he gets fired, he comes home dissatisfied, 'Allah has justified this.' So one little thing she does, she can get beat, and it's okay. And Muslim men in general support this.

M.--I'm sure you know there is a passage in Quran that there is a step by step progression.⁵¹ The first step is you separate from the bed. Isn't that enough to give them a warning?

H.--It's the criteria in which you read that that makes a difference. In a normal situation in a normal, balanced society, after a revolution, okay, where everyone understands where we have come from and that it's collective this and collective that; and women or men go against the group, maybe for example want to reestablish a capitalistic system, or like, bring the Shah back. then that woman would

be considered a lewd woman because she is going against the group and so she should be punished. But that would be the same for men, too.

M.--I like to hear it like that, because that makes a lot of sense; that if the woman is a traitor, then separate yourself from her...

H.--But not because of his personal feelings. Not because the man is personally upset. That shouldn't be the criterion for that woman being punished. It's if she goes against the collective will of her people.

M.--So you attribute this to *Nushuz*, which is the Iranic word, disobedience of the general will of a class, etc., rather than the whim of the husband?

H.--Yes, because the whim of the husband is flaky. That's a human being that makes mistakes, with defects, and I can never live under that rule, that what mood my husband is in, that means that he'll sleep with me that night. That's totally ridiculous. That doesn't even make sense. It's the collective will of the group, the struggle of the group, that if that individual becomes so individualistic that it hurts the group, then man, woman, or child, that person should be punished. But not on a personal basis, like -- you were my husband and you were dissatisfied with me -- I burnt your toast so all of a sudden I gotta go to hell because you're displeased with me. You know, that's not

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because my marriage was arranged. It was a man. I've never seen a woman guardian.

M.--Was he a relative?

H.--No. He wasn't related to me; because most Muslims in America don't have Muslim relatives. So he was just a person in the mosque. The guardian in our community in Washington was a person that arranged the marriage, I talked to him and asked him advice about the man I was going to marry, and we had a first come, first serve system where, when it was time for a brother to get married, he'd marry the sister who was next in line. Like if, the seniority -- if you had been waiting the longest, then it was your turn to get married more so than the sister who just came into the mosque. It was more verbal than a written list. Everybody knew who was who.

M.--Did you know your husband before you married him?

H.--No. We talked two weeks.

M.--Did that bother you at all, that you didn't know him?

H.--I didn't know any other way of getting married.

M.--Hypothetically, how would you feel about that today, if a stranger came to you and wanted to marry you?

H.--I would think he was crazy. (laughter) No, I definitely would have to get to know him.

M.--'Get to know him' in Biblical terms?

H. --I would have to know how this person functioned -- not

so sexually -- his mannerisms. His political growth makes a difference. I would not marry a man -- permanently marry a man -- who had not made a commitment to eradicating oppression, now that I'm thirty-one; because that was one of the problems in my marriage.

M.--So his politics would be most important, not his looks?

H.--Looks are nice, but that doesn't make a marriage.

M.--Property?

H.--No. Property, riches, and all that stuff don't make a difference.

M.--You said, 'permanently marry'. Do you know of some other ways?

H.--Well there's Mutah--temporary marriages.

M.--But that's for Shi'ite women, only, because orthodox . .

H.--I don't attach myself to schools of thought. That probably sounds terrible to the average Muslim, because I was introduced to Islam through orthodox Islam. I do the best I can, okay. I don't even tell people that I'm Muslim. I try to practice what I believe. You know, I don't tell them to go to the mosque. A lot of my cliches I don't even use anymore, and so there might be a lot of people in the mosque that don't even consider me Muslim, because my appearance is different, my voice is different, the way I speak about it is different.

M.--Who told you about Mutah? What do you know about this?

... and I've seen in Mutah ...

... frequently carried to someone?

... about Mutah I hated it. I ...

... how could they do this?

... if I was doing it. It ...

... and it was always, to me, just ...

... just a way of sleeping with ...

... And when I asked brothers ...

... Mutah? they ...

... because we have to have sexual release. This was ...

... When I was married, I didn't like ...

... I couldn't understand. I was narrow-minded. ...

... with somebody else, but my husband ...

...

...

... I don't know. Because most of the men who did it didn't ...

... their wives. But that was fear in all our minds. And ...

... marriages that we were around broke up ...

... Mutah situations, when the men did say it; and they ...

... would lose everything. Because the men would mistreat their ...

... first wives ... they went wild. They started sleeping ...

... with women who had no sense of morality, had no respect for ...

... Islam, had no respect for the wife that had borne his ...

... children. And he just went crazy. So it broke up a lot of ...

marriages and I hated at least this misapplication of it.

M.--What about these Iranian brothers who were in Mutah situations; did they propose to you that they wanted to have Mutah, or did you just ask them questions, or did you witness it?

H.--Because I was around Iranians so much, it was just obvious, you understand? I've never been in a Mutah situation with an Iranian. Blacks practice Mutah, too.⁵²

M.--But did an Iranian ever tell you that he had a Mutah or was this just theoretical?

H.--Well I knew women who were involved in Mutah marriages with Iranian men.

M.--Iranian women?

H.--No, black women. I never knew an Iranian woman who was in a Mutah situation.

M.--But how did this arrangement work? 'Take this twenty-five cents and we'll be married for ten minutes . . .

H.--Well it can be for ten minutes or ten months. It is whatever you verbally contract. Like I had a friend that was in a Mutah situation and she had a dowry -- you're supposed to get a dowry even with a Mutah situation -- I forgot what she got. I don't know if she got money -- let's say three hundred dollars -- some people get gifts, a sewing machine -- it's all what they contract between the people. In this situation the man did not live with her, he visited

her. A lot of brothers would help the woman, not just sexually, you know, with a ride or taking her places. They would keep company with her.

M.--Were these married or single men?

H.--In this particular situation, it was a single. Most Iranian men who have Mutah situations are not married. They are students, or they live here temporarily and are going back home, and they can't afford a full-fledged marriage. And they don't want to have any babies.

M.--So this is more of an economic type of thing?

H. --Yes. Now I understand it and I don't see anything wrong with it. Because how can a man come all the way over here, poor, trying to get an education, can't afford a marriage or to have children. Is he supposed to be celibate for four to eight years, however long it takes to get an education? That doesn't make sense. That's not practical, so they should have that right. Not just Iranian men, all men and women should have that right to have that type of sexual freedom. But before I didn't understand and I hated it, but more so I hated the application because people were hurting people. Men were being disrespectful. Now I'm not as narrow-minded about the whole thing. I think it makes everything much healthier. Mutah can have a real progressive function, as long as it's not abused. Anything can be abused. You know, with people in this country and

the way they have been trained sexually and how to treat women . . . they have a tendency to abuse Mutah and marriage and polygamy. I've been around all sorts of situations.

M.--What about polygamy?

H.--Most of the polygamist situations that I've seen did not work because the status of the women was an oppressive status, so they couldn't function. They couldn't flourish, they couldn't get along. There was always some type of conflict, jealousy, fighting; and a lot of the men would ego-trip off of that, to make them feel powerful. You're talking about poor, working class Muslims who have no power over the mode of production in this country and the only power they have is over women and children; so that's bound to get somebody abused or misused. So that abuse comes out through our marriages, even if it's a one-on-one. You know, like I said, we're all on a prostitutional level in this country, until things change. And I think polygamy can work in the right environment.

M.--How can women free themselves from this prostitution?

Should both men and women work and be independent?

H.--If I had it to do all over again, I would just start having babies now. I would maybe just start thinking about getting married now. I would never have gotten married and never have started having babies so young. I never would have done that, I would have done something else. I would

have read thousands of books first, went to thousands of schools, got a job -- I never worked, except five years ago when I started working, because I was always being taken care of. A person who is being taken care of does not have the opportunity to grow.

M.--Do you think you are alone in your ideas, or are there many other women who feel this way who suffer but don't have the guts to talk about this?

H.--I think that they suffer. I think that they don't have the guts to speak out or question or inquire. And I think that their consciousness is not raised to the level where they understand what is happening to them. They don't see their class interests in this situation so they don't understand how to get out of it.

M.--Karl Marx puts sexual relations in terms of class struggle -- that is to say: man is the bourgeoisie and woman is the proletariat. You seem to go along with that notion.

H.--You can't separate even sex out of class interests. You see, when you understand your class interests, even your sexual relationship changes. American sexual relationship basically breaks down to this: a man meets his needs; and when his needs are met, the whole act stops. And women are trained not to question that.

M.--American?

H.--Women in general -- Muslim women and non-Muslim women.

M.--But certainly you have a feminist movement here?

H.--Well, they're trying. At least the women's movement has brought it to the surface as far as women getting complete satisfaction from the sexual relationships and being verbal and telling men about their needs, because our bodies are different, you know. The response is different. And men are not trained to satisfy women on that level. Women are trained to satisfy men, and all the rest is a big fake. We're trained to fake, and you're unhappy for the rest of your life, because you can't verbalize what you want, you can't say anything, because you'll hurt your husband's ego. And no woman wants to hurt a man's ego in our society, because that's your security, so you lie -- if not verbally, physically or whatever and you go the rest of your life totally unsatisfied, mentally, spiritually and physically. And it's a horrible feeling. It is a horrible feeling. And women talk about these things somewhat in their circles. You know, we had a workshop when I first came to Houston on sexuality in Islam. And it was like, for any other functions, we couldn't get any of the sisters to come out of their houses, but when we had a workshop on sex, the whole house was filled. Women in veils, women without veils everybody came.

M.--Why was that?

H.--Because they wanted to talk about it. They wanted to ask questions. They wanted to learn. They were dissatisfied; that's why they came.

M.--What were some of the questions?

H.--One of our basic topics was orgasm. Since buying books on sex was 'dirty', you know, you shouldn't buy no books on sex, you shouldn't do those kinds of things in Islam, right? You just read your *Hadith*, there's a small amount of *Hadiths* on sexuality and stuff, but I haven't read anything extensive. So we just started talking about that, talking about the concept of orgasm because everybody has a right, every woman has a right to have an orgasm. But it's how you train your husband.

M. --They didn't know about this?

H.--No. And we talked just about the sex act in general. You know, what do you do? How do you do it? And there were questions. M.--Was the general type of feeling that men think this is their act and women are just tools?

H.--Their act; possessive; selfish; and tools. And men did not know anything about how women had orgasms. That was one of the major things. They didn't know; and women didn't know how to tell them. And some of the women didn't know.

M.--Why couldn't the women tell? Surely a woman can talk to her husband.

H.--No, you can't. Not on things like that. Sometimes you

can, but sometimes you don't. There are women who go for years not having orgasms, because they don't know how to verbalize it. Positions in sex -- we can't even find those things in -- you know, I guess you can deal with your wife like a till.⁵³ Wow! What about your husband? And every woman knows at a point in her life that the basic sex position, man on top of woman, does not bring woman to orgasm.

M.--Huh!

H.--So we talked about that a lot, and how to get that different; how to rearrange that. And we talked about masturbation. You know, the pros and cons of masturbation and what do you do? It went on for hours. You know we talked about those things, because where is the literature on that? There's no literature on that. What great Islamic thinker is breaking down sexuality to us? How do we train our children in sexuality? What do we tell little boys, about ejaculation and things like that. And periods and stuff. How do we do that so they'll have a healthy attitude about sex? How do you prepare them for that? Where are the books? I haven't found them.

M.--That's right. This is forbidden in Islam.

H.--So that's a big thing. That's a problem. Because in Islam, you're not supposed to be an aggressive woman, so that passiveness is in your bed. So your politics and your

bed are the same.

M.--Do you think one symbolizes the other?

H.--Yeah. And it's just like the community. The political consciousness of the women tells you where the men are. They tell on what level in reality where those men are. Those women are naive and narrow-minded and they don't read and they're not active. Then that's a big defect in the male part of that community. Because our nation, and when I say 'our nation', I mean all poor people. Sometimes I say 'my' people and I might mean African people, but basically my people are all people. And until women acquire a certain level of political growth and maturity, our people will always be in chains. And that maturity has to be sexual, spiritual, mental, physical, whatever. That's real important. And until the status of mothers and children is high, then our people will never be free. And so if I ever got to go to Iran, I would investigate the status of mothers and children; because mothers are to be treated like expensive glass, because we carry the nation. It should be a big thing to be a mother. In America, to be a mother is not a big thing. You go to find a house. No dogs; no kids. The same with what they think about motherhood. But in a progressive community, mothers and children should have high status, should be supported, should have collective day care systems. I would look for that in Iran. Women should be

able to get away from housework, because that's oppression. There should be a socialistic attitude toward housework. There should be a collective attitude toward that. Because if we have to spend half our time cleaning houses, we have no time to read or go out in the community. And housework is terrible.

Appendix B

During my study I attended several speeches by the fundamentalist Iraqi, Qais al Kalbi. I found the following speech to be of particular interest because of his complete presentation of the traditional Islamic attitude toward women, particularly in contrast with the liberal views of Hitaji Aziz in Appendix A. The speech was delivered on a Tuesday night, the eve of Ramadhan 27. This transcription is from a cassette recording which I obtained a copy of through patient and persistent efforts.

In the name of God, the most merciful, the most compassionate, praise be to the Lord of the worlds, who is merciful and compassionate. And divine greetings on Muhammad, his family, his companions, and anyone who follows him to the day of judgment. The best hadith is the book of God, and the best hadith is the sayings of the prophet Muhammad. God Almighty says: "We did not send thee except as a mercy for the world." Thus everything that the prophet brought us is a mercy. Following everything he said is a mercy.

Why don't we accept this mercy? The past nations did not achieve such mercy, because they did not adhere to the divine message. It is particularly true about the Jews, who consider themselves as the loved ones and children of God and the chosen people. And it appears today that they are

chosen people! They did not achieve such mercy because, not shouldering the divine responsibility, they cheated themselves. And God Almighty says concerning them, [62/5]: "The likeness of those who are entrusted with the law of Moses, yet apply it not, is as the likeness of the ass carrying books. Wretched is the likeness of folk who deny the revelations of Allah. And Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk." Had they carried out their responsibility, they would not be as such. Despite the fact that God sent them prophets, they cheated on the book of God, even concerning the issue of women.

And tonight, God, willing, I will address the issue of women; because this issue is very important, and the apostle says, "The devil has one arrow, but women have seven." God Almighty approves the statement of the pharaoh of Egypt, that, [12/28]: "Lo! this is the guile of you women. Lo! the guile of you is very great." Thus the issue of women in society is very important, and as the prophet says, "Woman is like a crooked column, and if you try to straighten it, it breaks." And the prophet in his last sermon during the farewell pilgrimage, spoke to them. Woman cannot achieve her rights in our human society except in an Islamic one. Even among the Jews, a woman had no right to touch the Torah, to read it, or to be taught it by others. But in our religion, a woman can read and study Quran and she has a

very important role to play in this respect. The prophet says, "Take half your religion from this lady," that is, from Aisha, may God be pleased with her. She transmitted many narrations from the prophet. The prophet did not marry so many women, save for the purpose of teaching women about themselves through his wives, because modesty is a column of religion. The one who has no modesty has no religion. When a woman would come to the prophet, asking him a question concerning rituals of menstruation and purification, he would leave the response to Aisha. In the past nations, women did not have a share of inheritance. [Qais skips from one subject to another.]

When we look up Quran and hadith, we do not find very many references to the issue of hijab (cover). The reason is that the society [of the first generation Muslims] was a healthy one. They would hear it once and obey it for all time. Concerning other issues, such as hypocrisy, treachery, pride, friendship with the unbelievers, disbelief in God's unity, drinking, adultery, and things of this sort, we find very few mentions, because once or twice would be enough and people would follow, knowing the prophet was mercy for the world. The contemporary society is a sick one, and books, studies, and tapes speak about it.

Let us consider what Quran says about hijab, [24/30-1]:
 "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest.

That is purer for them . . . And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest". Once the prophet was sitting somewhere [and he saw a woman]. Then he got up and went home. When he returned he had water dripping from him. He said, "Do what I did. I saw such and such woman and immediately I went to my wife." So anyone who sees a strange woman should go to his own wife, because what this woman has, his wife has too. The mischiefs of women are many and great. Okay you women, before marriage you may leave your hair out to attract a husband. But why do you continue to leave it out after? What else do you want? It is as if you wish to be the wife of the entire community. When an unmarried man sees a pretty and colorful woman, whose fault is it? It is the fault of the woman and it is the fault of the guardian of that woman, be it her father or her brother. The prophet, peace be upon him, says, "You are all shepherds, and you are all responsible for your flock." Imam is a shepherd. Husband is a shepherd . . .

A woman comes to the house of the prophet with two of her daughters. Aisha opens the door. They enter. Aisha looks for some food in the house for the guests. She finds nothing but a single date -- yes, a single date. What do you think she looked for? For some beer? For some music? For the songs of Abdul Halim Hafiz? No! a single date. Did she say, "Let me entertain you with some music, and then see

what you want?" No! She gives it to the woman. The latter splits it in two halves and gives it to her daughters. Aisha is impressed and tells the prophet about this action. The prophet says, "Anyone like her who has two daughters, educates them well, and gets them married well, paradise is assured for her."

Then you man, if you wish to enter paradise, and marry the hoories, who are more beautiful than your present wife, you should guard your women well. If you herd them well, and train them well, because of them, you will enter paradise. In another saying, the prophet says, "If someone has seven daughters, and he educates them well, and gets them married well, paradise is assured for him." He is asked "But if he has only three?" -- "He will enter paradise." -- "If two?" -- "Even if he has two." -- Then he adds, "It doesn't necessarily mean his own daughters; it means any woman under his responsibility." The daughters of one's maternal and paternal aunt, his grandmother, etc. Thus the responsibility goes back to man. If a man is pious, woman will follow him. God makes the woman love the man. Let me speak of a personal experience. If a woman loves you, she will accept you and accept your religion and accept everything you have. I have a wife. Her father always made her wear a veil and say prayers. She always cheated. Her father was an immoral person himself. When she married me,

I bought her hijab. She said, "It is beautiful. I love it and I will wear it." I am not praising myself. I am telling you about being moral.

The apostle of God is sitting with two of his wives. A blind man by the name of Abdullah ibn Maktum enters. Yes, a blind companion, coming from a very healthy society. The prophet orders the two wives to leave. They say, "He is blind." The prophet says, "Don't you see him?" Are we more pious than this companion? Can we be more sure than this blind man that we don't care when looking at women. Masjid or not masjid, that is not the question. Women come with their devilish dress and makeup, and we have different opinions. The commandment of God is this: "If a woman goes out of the house, to solve a problem, she is welcome. If she goes out to create a problem, we don't need woman to leave the house." This will weaken man's mind if he sees women without proper cover. It is trouble over trouble over trouble. He can no longer have control over himself and over his religion. This is why, in European and western societies, men can no longer control their women. This is due to their loss of virility due to frequent looking at women, touching them, or other dirty things. For this reason, there is a lot of divorce and a lot of corruption. In our traditional Islamic societies, there did not used to be divorce, because men and women did not look at each

other. The husband thought his wife was the purest honey, and the wife thought her husband was the purest honey, because she had no experience with other men. This is why the prophet says: "The virgin is permitted and the deflowered is commanded." Why? Because the virgin is under the command of her guardian. He knows best what is good for her. But the deflowered? She has experienced a man. And she knows which man is best for her. Thus this is the duty of us all: to cover all our women with the Islamic code of dressing. And what is the Islamic code of dressing? God has defined it in His book. [Qais misreads the verse and I correct him.] Yes, that's it. It has nothing to do with these modern low-cut dresses, which show the neck and back and hair. Hair is what makes the beauty of women more manifest. This is why the daughter of the prophet, Fatimah, was covered from head to toe.

The prophet says, "If a woman exits the house with[out] the permission of her husband, there is curse upon her." And what is the curse? The blessing does not come to the house. It does not come to the property. Cars break down, children are sick every day, there are accidents and problems. This is the curse. The prophet says, "If a woman puts perfume on and she goes out of the house, and a man smells her, it is as if he has committed adultery with her." How many men can see a woman like that? The prophet says,

"The back rows of prayer for women are better than the first rows." The opposite is true for men. It is best for woman to say her prayers at home. Her prayer at home is superior to her prayer in the masjid. At the time of the prophet, there was only one masjid in Medina. Still the prophet prefers that women do not say their prayers in the his masjid, which is one of the most sacred places, and that they do it at home, instead. In short, a woman's prayer in her house is better than her prayer in the masjid of the prophet. And you know, saying a prayer in the masjid of the prophet is better than one thousand prayers in any other masjid, with the exception of the sacred masjid of Mecca. Well of course the prophet does not say "Prevent your girl-slaves from coming to the masjid." Still he insists that they should attend without troublemaking. Woman causes problems. In books of history, there are numerous accounts of women causing trouble for men. They sometimes have caused wars. And this Quran witnesses such things too. Note the episode of our lady Aisha. She was accused and God Almighty vindicated her. Still, because she was alone, people accused her.(*). Why should we remain a sick society? Why don't we accept God and the prophet's commandments? And you woman, if you dress properly, you are doing yourself good. If you do so, your husband will trust you. But if you go out of the house colorfully and lewdly, then what?

When you want to go out, you dress up and wear perfume. But when you are at home with your husband your mouth smells like onion and garlic, and you go around unclean. The prophet explains this very clearly. "Prophecy has ended and I shall not see two groups: men who go around having a whip, like the tail of a cow in their hands (our governors today) and the kasiatun-ariatun ('covered/uncovered') women, . . . with their hair hanging as if they were . . . They shall not smell the air of paradise . . ." And again, what is the Islamic code of dressing? It should not include jewelry, either. It is a disaster if a woman is beautiful, and does not wear proper clothes, but she wears jewelry. Our scholars say: "Such woman should wear niqab (full face veil). [Someone interrupts.] Okay, let me finish with the issue of hijab, and if there is time, I will discuss niqab. One problem at a time. If a woman is covered, men do not see whether her legs are skinny, or short, or what. One would marry her because she is religious. He will love her and God will strengthen this love. There should not be love before marriage. This is another issue I shall discuss later. God Almighty does not mention love and seduction before marriage. He says, [30/21]: "And of His signs is this: He created for you helpmates from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and he ordained between you love and mercy." Love comes after marriage, as the result of

man's gentle treatment of his wife. Mercy is expected from man to his wife, because he is superior to her. If marriage is done for the pleasure of God, God will bless it. And God says, [24/33]: "And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste till Allah give them independence by His grace. And such of your slaves as seek a writing (of emancipation), write it for them if ye are aware of aught of good in them." Then it does not mean that you go and marry an American or a French woman because she is beautiful, and you hope that she will become Muslim.

Islamic code of dressing for women is not short, transparent or tight, so that the shape of the torso is revealed. It should not contain the smell of perfume. It should be clean, not smelling bad, but not perfume either. If women obey all this, we will have a blessed society. Every day we address God and say, "Oh Allah!" He will say, "Yes, what do you want? I'll give it to you." But when we say today, "God have mercy upon us," while we are naked, and then we say, "God, forgive us; God give us"; He will say, "What did you give me, such that I should give you?" [2/186]: "And when my servants question thee concerning Me, the surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he crieth unto me. So let them hear my call and let them trust in Me, in order that they may be led aright."

Another problem is the quality of dress. It should not

be the dress of fame (shuhrah), that is to say, a loud dress. The prophet says, "Anyone who dresses in the garment of shuhrah in this world, shall not wear it in the hereafter"; and, "Anyone who makes his pants a means of attracting people, he and his pants will be in hell-fire." This saying of the prophet concerns both men and women. But a woman, by dressing in the garment of shuhrah, can cause a problem. Other women may wish to have the same thing. They will go to their husbands asking, "Buy it for me; buy it for me!" This is horrible. This may cause waste in society and waste is haram (forbidden). [17/27]: "Lo! the squanderers were ever brothers of the devils, and the devil was ever an ingrate to his Lord." At the time of Umar, the wife of a companion had no clothes to wear. They had been worn out. So the husband went to Umar, who was the commander of believers. He said, "Give me, or I'll hold you responsible on the day of judgment." So Umar supplied the clothes. Thus if one cannot afford to have proper dress, it is the duty of the government of the time to supply it. A true commander of believers does not let his people go hungry, thirsty, or naked. At any rate, a woman will not go to paradise unless she wears the Islamic code of dressing. A husband should treat his wife in such a manner as to encourage her to wear it, be it a kindly asking of her, or threatening her with divorce, even though she may have ten

children. If the man is truthful, God will inspire his wife to accept everything he says.

Now I'll tell you about my personal experience in life. I have a wonderful wife. But she used to be influenced by some bad things. Naturally we had tape recorder, television, and things of this sort in the house. One day I thought, "I am a Muslim; I shouldn't have these things at home instead of having Islamic books." So I decided to tell her, "The house belongs to me. I am in and you are out. I'll give you your rights and you give me my rights, and good-bye. My right is that you should be a righteous wife to me." The first thing God says is that one should advise them. If this does not work, one should separate his bed. This is a very wonderful experience. Separation of beds! Woman cannot stand it. At this stage, she came to me and said, I repented. I accept that you are my husband and I should obey you. God tells his prophet, [33 /28-9]: "O Prophet! Say unto thy wives: If ye desire the world's life and its adornment, come! I will content you and will release you with a fair release. But if ye desire Allah and His messenger, and the abode of the Hereafter, then lo! Allah hath prepared for the good among you an immense reward." Anyone who does anything to please God, God will help him. One should not say, "I am financially incapable of remarrying." One should not say, "I have five children,

I cannot leave her." God is the only one who gives the daily bread. God Almighty says, [24/26]: "Vile women are for vile men, and the vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women; such are innocent of that which people say: For them is pardon and a bountiful provision." Thus vile women belong to vile men, and vice versa. If a woman is vile, God gives her a vile man, and vice versa. If a woman is good, God gives her a good husband, and vice versa. Thus you, man, if you are good, and you ask God for a good wife, God will give her to you. He will give you children so good that they can be the apple of your eye.

There were two companions, businessmen of jewelry. They were on a trip. One of them was returning, so the other gave him a jewel to deliver to his wife. When the man went to the other's wife, he saw her hand from behind the curtain, and, remembering the words of the prophet, decided he should go immediately to his own wife. When he came to her, she said, "Something strange happened to me today. A water-seller came to the door and he saw my hand when I reached for the water. I felt strange about this." The husband asked what time this happened. It was exactly the same time he had seen the other woman's hand.

God knows best what is good for us. The prophet knows what is best for us. There is no reason for us not to obey

God and the prophet. All that we said concerns Muslim women only. For infidel women, whether polytheists or unbeliever, the jurisprudential rule for them is like that of a man. They can go on as if they were men. The catastrophe of women is difficult. The rope of Satan is long. Another duty of a Muslim woman is not to have hammu in her house. By this I mean brothers-in-law and other close male relatives when she is by herself. A woman should not travel more than three nights without the companionship of a mahram (closest of the male relatives). It is even best that he travels with her from the beginning. At the time of the apostle, someone told the prophet, "My wife went with women." And he said, "Follow her." One goes to Hajj pilgrimage to repent. Even there the Satan is following. In comparison to the sacred masjid of Mecca, how much does the masjid of Houston count? Who shoulders these responsibilities? Oh you women, don't you fear God? You come here to say prayers. Your prayers are not accepted without a proper hijab. Your prayer is not accepted unless you wear the Islamic code of dressing. Kasiat Ariat-- covered and uncovered at the same time -- how can such prayer be accepted? Oh you women, as far as hell-fire is concerned, there is no tender/untender. The hell-fire will burn both. For men and women there will be the same reward, heaven or hell. The prophet says, "The majority of the

inhabitants of hell are women." Yes, the majority of the inhabitants of hell are women. When the prophet went to his heavenly journey, he saw some women hanged by their hair, experiencing punishment, being beaten on their breasts, and some of them on their hand, etc., etc. Why? They are the women who showed these parts, because they showed these seductive parts to strangers. Yes Satan is with us. The prophet says, "If a woman and a man are sitting together, the third party will be the Satan. Praise to the Lord that he does not say, "As if they committed adultery." If he said so, the case would be very difficult. He says, "Their third partner is Satan." He says that the trap is there. God Almighty says, [17/3 2]: [He misreads the verse and I stop him again and correct him:] "And come not near unto adultery. Lo! it is an abomination and an evil way." He doesn't say, "Do not commit adultery," he says, "Do not get close to it." [In a sarcastic tone:] Yes, you ask her to sit with you so you can teach her a little bit of Quran, so you can study a little bit with the American girl; it doesn't matter. Ah, she may become a Muslim -- What has happened to your brain? Let's have dinner tonight. No! The one in whose heart is sickness will be tempted in situations such as this. That is why a Muslim can only converse with women from behind the curtains. [33/53]: "And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet)

anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts." Yes, even in that healthy society, Muslims were ordered to do so. You cannot simply give someone something and say, "Give it to my wife." It must be done from behind the curtain.

A woman can only be in the house of a trustworthy man when her husband is present. [Somebody raises question concerning trust.] I am not entering the issue of trust now. I am simply speaking of the proper code of dressing. I am saying that a man cannot take his sisters to somebody else's house, so that he and he and his sisters and his sisters can sit together. Believe me, the devil will be there, standing strong. Women should sit in one corner and men in another corner. [Somebody raises a question concerning man and woman sitting together with Satan there.] Do not do that. I told you what the prophet says, and I told you the story of Abdullah ibn Maktum. Yes, women have eyes, too. They are capable of passionate gaze, too. But they are tricky. They don't tell straightforwardly that they are sexually interested in someone. They indicate this by other means. They simply say, so-and-so is a nice guy, or something of this sort. I myself have heard it so many time from girls. Are there any questions, or shall I conclude?

Q. God bless you brother for this speech. You spoke of khimar (hijab). What about iqab (full face veil)? Which

one is preferred?

A.--Both are good. One should look into what the society requires and what the woman needs. Every society is different . . . For example, in Iraq, if the woman puts on proper Islamic code of dressing, the promiscuous men do not dare to get close to her. They respect her, therefore they avoid her.

Q.--What about the women who go to universities and have foreign men teach them?

A.--I answered this already. If a woman goes out of her house to solve a problem, fine. If she is going to cause a problem, she shouldn't. Okay. Suppose a woman's husband dies and she has many children, and she is in some country such as Iraq or Syria where the Communists or the Ba'thists are in power, or in any other corrupted unbeliever society. It does not matter if she puts on proper Islamic dress and gets a decent job. She can be a teacher. She can study to be a doctor for women. She can be a dressmaker. She cannot, however, work in a restaurant and serve hamburgers. She cannot work for radio or television, broadcasting the news of "his majesties." This is in opposition to religion. By God it is not necessary for women to study engineering. What good does it do for her? Or chemistry or physics or things of this sort. These are traps of the devil. True that Islam says that seeking

knowledge is required. By knowledge is meant knowledge of religion. It may also include the knowledge of the secular kind, if it is not in contradiction to religion.

Q.--[Qais cannot hear the voice of the questioner.
Everybody tries to help at once. At last . . .]
Coeducation, what is your opinion on that?

A.--It is true that our governors in our Islamic countries are unbelievers. But still, our schools are not coeducational, praise the Lord. In some countries, maybe. But normally, there is opportunity for the ones who do not wish to participate in coeducational schools. At any rate, you should avoid these kinds of institutions. If coeducation becomes obligatory, one should teach his girls at home. Of course, because it is man's duty to serve the society, men can participate in coeducation, but not women. One should avoid this kind of corruption until God somehow opens the door. True that our governors are unbelievers. Yet our boys and girls do not meet in the schools. They meet in theaters and places like that. I have daughters, too. And none of them has ever been to school. I just let them learn things in the masjids. I will continue to do so until some Islamic formal schools are established, providing elementary, secondary, and so forth. Why is it necessary for a woman to go to a university and become an old woman, so that she can at last get married? How many times have men committed

adultery with these kinds of women on the streets? Well, one can commit adultery by gaze. The prophet says, "The first look is yours. But not the second one." Any other questions?

Q.--What is the meaning of "If a man sees a woman, he should go to his wife"? [Somebody else answers the question.]

Q.--How about women and politics?

A.--The prophet says, "The people who are governed by women are never blessed." Of course, women can participate in politics in an indirect way. She has her opinion. She can influence her husband. She can express her opinion from behind the curtain.

Q.--Can she be a member of parliament?

A.--Not at all.

Q.--Even though she may follow the Islamic code of dressing?

A.--Even though she may follow the Islamic code of dressing! Did the prophet ever consult women on such matters? He never did. And Quran, concerning consultation, uses the masculine plural pronoun "Hum", meaning the men, not women. Does it mean men and women? Not at all! But women's opinion should be heard. And it happens that sometimes they have a say, like the story goes about the women who disputed Umar on the amount of marriage

settlement. Umar at last said, 'Umar is wrong and the woman is right.' Still, I emphasize, they should not be in a position of leadership. Consider that four female witnesses are equal to two male witnesses. And in matters of marriage, the prophet would not accept the witnessing of women only. There had to be a male among them, because women's religion and mind are defective and they are too emotional. And you know this. Yes, women are very emotional and sensitive. Yes, this is quite natural. There may be some exceptions, but they are only exceptions. [There is a big dispute and a lot of noise. He hears someone talking about female doctors and women having to go to male doctors. He answers:]

A.--When one is compelled, it is okay.

[From here on the questions and answers are repetitive or irrelevant to the issue. I notice that Qais is paying attention to the cassette recording his speech. It may or may not be a coincidence that he ends after 90 minutes with "Praise be to the prophet," as the tape runs out.]

Appendix C

MONOLOGUE OF AN ANONYMOUS OLD EGYPTIAN

Listen to me if you want to know the truth. I am over 60 years old and I have lived among people of many different Muslim communities. It is only recently that I have come to the United States. Muslims are no longer Muslims. Religion has become subservient to politics. By politics I do not mean the noble old politics of Muhammad and his companions, nor of the traditional chiefs, maliks, and sultans. I refer to the dirty politics of oil and weapons.

The inhabitants of Arabia Desert used to come to my country Egypt to beg for a loaf of bread. Now that they have oil, so soon have they forgotten their past. They have mistaken oil with Allah. They are the biggest hypocrites in the world. Not only that fat and ugly King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, but all the rest of them as well. I swear there is not one drop of Arab blood in them. Instead it is oil that runs in their veins. They are unbelievers from head to toe. They even lack the original Bedouin morality of muruwat. And please, if you are a supporter of Khomeini, do not be offended, but he is no different. I am one span away from my grave, and I like to be honest. Khomeini is even more dangerous than others. Because others have committed so many crimes in the public eye, if they decree something about Allah, very few believe them. Khomeini utters the

name "Allah" so many times a day, and everyone of you seems to take him seriously. I am not saying he is an enemy of Islam, but he is an ignorant friend. He is doing exactly what the enemies of Islam like to do to us. And let me tell you, I liked your shah, Muhammad Reza. He was a sinner like any other king. He loved wine and women. And why not? He had a peculiar faith and he was quite a handsome man; women liked him. That does not make him any different from the rest of the kings. You know, when Egypt was in economic crisis, Sadat spoke to the nation, saying, "Here is the Egyptian army, hungry and barefooted. For God's sake, somebody adopt this army and feed it! The poor people of Egypt cannot afford to support it." None of them, none of these nouveaux riches arabs helped him. Then he said, "Do not push me to the point of no return." Poor Sadat! May God have mercy on him! What other choice did he have except to negotiate with these bastard Jews? How else could he have survived? A-hah! What I wanted to tell you was that when Egypt was in crisis, it was the Shah of Iran who generously gave us money. We all gave thanks to him. May Allah be pleased with him! His help came shortly after the grand Mufti of Egypt said on the pulpit, "Egypt is in crisis; every Muslim is required to help her." Hearing this, tears fell from my eyes. You see, up till then, I was so naive, I expected the whole Islamic world to give us aid.

I thought it was the time for the Arabs to repay their debt to Egypt. You know, we sent them our doctors, engineers, educators, all we had. They have forgotten the time when Caliph Umar had an economic problem and he wrote to the governor of Egypt for the solution. We sent a caravan, the head of which had entered Medina and the tail of which was still in Egypt. You see how shortsighted these people are? They call us "Muslim brothers" but they keep their money in American banks. And they push our president to go and sit with the chief enemy of Islam. Then, when it is too late, they call him names on their radios and in their conferences. Shortly after, goodness knows what happens in Egypt: buses burned, children set afire, the communists, the socialists, and other godless charlatans find their opportunity. Soon the president is assassinated. Sadat became a sacrificial lamb, a poor victim with no choice. You see what happens? They push you to a point of no choice, and then no matter what you do, you are a traitor in their eyes, as if they wanted you to be a traitor; so that they can talk about treason and curse the traitor. It is just like throwing one's child in front of a moving car in order to collect insurance money. It is only the old and the wise who may realize these things. The young never do. They fail to see what is going on underneath.

If you wish to propagate Islam, be a good example of

it. There is no use going around telling people they should worship the one God or they should believe in the prophet or judgment day. They are polite if they don't laugh at you if you order for others what you don't practice yourself. We hear over and over that we don't have enough propagators of Islam. Nonsense. We have too many propagators and not enough practitioners. Why do people like to buy a certain car and they don't like to buy another? It is or at least should be because a certain car is good, works well, and does not break down. Islam is not a shoddy commodity, such that one has to do commercials for it. If you are good, if your relation to your neighbors is good, if you are honest and pious, people will approach you and ask, "What is your religion? We want to follow it." But if you are a crooked man, lying and being dishonest, then no matter what good books you have or what good words you can spread, not one wise soul will follow you. This is what we are suffering from. A few true believers, but almost everyone else hypocrites to one degree or another. I personally confess that I am a sinner and that I could have lived much better as a Muslim. But I realized too late that I should not necessarily be like others. It is a pity that we think what everyone does is right. A true Muslim never compromises a part of his religion.

You see, I told you that I am an Egyptian. When your

Shah, Prince Muhammad Reza, wanted to marry Fowziyah, the sister of King Faruqh, Muhammad Mustafa al-Marighi, the Mufti of Egypt, made him convert to "true Islam." He was made to say, "I witness there is no deity but Allah; I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah; I witness that Abu Bakr, Umar Uthman, and Ali are the vice regents of God." How different is this compromise from that of the Ayatollah? Up to yesterday or the day before, we were "the Sunni dogs, usurpers of the right of the family of the prophet." Today, thanks to politics, we are "Sunni Muslim brothers." Which are we supposed to believe? You see, men of politics always compromise; only they call it something else. But I say to this political brotherhood: No thanks! If Egypt wants a revolution, let her do the job herself. It is none of your business if we are backward or have a corrupt ruler. If you are a good housewife, then keep your own kitchen clean. We know our Islam better, if we wish, we can have an Islamic government. A Shi'ite government we had a long time ago. You have heard of the Fatimites? (**)
Thanks to them, there is not a single Shi'ite in Egypt today. Not a single one! We once had Muslim brotherhood and so forth, but you see, the situation does not happen just the way people may wish. The prophet said, "Islam began Gharib (lonely and alien) and it will in time return to be Gharib" Now is the time. How else can we describe

our situation? We are strangled by non-Muslims and pseudo-Muslims alike, in every place and on every level. We are so busy fighting each other that we don't have time to fight the enemy. I seek refuge to God, because the Islamic world is defeated by a bunch of European Jews. Instead of facing reality and opening our eyes, we are making excuses in our minds. Conspiracy, big powers, American arms, the treason of heads of state -- who are these heads of state? They are of us. True that our enemy is strong, but why are we weak? Why can't we unite and be strong? If we unite, no one can defeat us. Disunited, we overlook the real enemy. The real enemy is so happy that we are fighting ourselves. And by fighting, I don't necessarily mean wars. Even in everyday life, we are constantly stepping on each others' toes, as if each of us were completely right and everyone else totally wrong. Competition . . . Competition! I don't know. These Islamic countries are like big shops selling the same commodity, competing with each other. Well, that's it. I'm sorry I talk too much. I hope you didn't mind. I thought it was necessary to teach you the lesson of my life.

Appendix D

During my study at the Islamic Society of Greater Houston. I came into contact with a great deal of literature, much of which I have gathered for the sake of analysis. It is practical to distinguish three categories of this literature: books, periodicals, and fliers and pamphlets.

The books I encountered represent general Islamic literature. There are of course traditional works, such as the Quran itself. A great deal of the books focus on particular Islamic issues, such as "cover," smoking, permissions and prohibitions, and clarification of concepts. Some of these books are for sale by the Society and others are available for loan through a library of 2500 books.

Periodicals were of particular interest in my study and find extensive mention in the body of this paper. These can be categorized as follows: periodical literature of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which in general only concern the politics of revolution; magazines published in Arab countries, concerning Islam and Muslim affairs; and local community periodicals. I shall deal with each category separately, beginning with the most extensive.

Among the publications of the Islamic Republic of Iran are newspapers, magazines, and journals, and they are produced in Persian, Arabic, and English. Some state so

directly, but all may be assumed to be published under official state control. Following is a fairly complete list: Surush, with separate editions in Arabic and Persian, each with somewhat different content; published for four years, monthly; state controlled, IRI.

Kayhan-al-Arabi, published daily in Arabic, IRI.

Echo of Islam, published in English for four years, IRI.

Al-Jihad: "The voice of the Islamic Movement in Iraq"; a weekly newspaper in English, IRI.

Al-Jihad a special edition in the form of a magazine; "For the political Islamic studies"; in English, IRI.

Mahjubah: "The magazine for Muslim Women"; in English, IRI.

Urwat al-Wuthqa: "Magazine of the Students and Youth of the Islamic Republic and Party of Iran"; weekly in English, IRI.

Al-Adhwa: "Magazine of General Islamic Thought"; published in Arabic for five years by "a group of holy-warrior ulama" in Iraq; IRI.

Al-Alam al-Islami, published in Arabic, IRI.

Jumhuri-e-Islami, a daily newspaper in Persian, IRI.

Kayhan-Havaii, a daily newspaper in Persian, IRI.

The quantity of magazines and newspapers from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries does not compare with the quantity issuing from Iran. From this fact one may infer the relative importance of this form of propagation,

particularly concerning political issues, in each culture. Nevertheless there are several publications from Arabic countries worthy of note:

Muslim World League Journal, published in English; Mecca.

Al-Towhid, a scholarly journal, published bi-monthly in Arabic for two years.

Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami, a cultural Islamic magazine, published in Arabic; Mecca.

Local community periodicals include those published by ISGH itself, other publications from Houston which may or may not be directed exclusively at the ISGH community, and some sent here from elsewhere in the U.S.A. Following is a list:

Voice of Islam, published for 1.3 years, monthly ISGH, under the supervision of the Secretary of Publications and Public relations, presently Mr. Buzdar.

Dastak, published monthly for four years in Urdu with some English; Houston.

Al-Burhan, a Masjid Daar-us-Salaam publication, in English; Houston.

Islamic Horizons, published monthly by the Muslim Students Association of U.S. and Canada, in English; Plainfield, Indiana.

There were also scores of pamphlets and fliers distributed during Ramadhan, much too numerous to mention

individually. Most of these are locally produced, by private individuals as well as by ISGH; although many are printed abroad. I have distinguished six categories of these fliers and pamphlets:

- Announcements of lectures, speeches, and symposiums to be held locally or in other cities.

- Declarations of special political events, such as the official Day of Jerusalem.

- Commercial advertisements for grocery stores (especially featuring hallal meat). automobiles, restaurants, etc.

- Social events, such as an Islamic picnic in a local park.

- News, such as a flier entitled "Muslim Community News," and independent news of repression from the Egyptian Relief Fund.

- A list of publications of an Islamic publishing company.

CHAPTER 4

A SHI'ITE WOMAN'S FUNERAL IN HOUSTON TEXAS

"... and, if it is a woman,
she is to be put toward the Qiblah . . . and
entered into the grave . . . while the grave
is covered with a piece of cloth. And the
corpse is to be taken out of the coffin and
entered into the grave quietly . . . and a
pillow of earth should be made under the
head. A piece of mud or mud-break should be
placed against the back of the dead so that
it does not turn over. And, before covering
the grave, the right hand should be put
firmly on the dead's left shoulder and the
mouth [of the Mulla] is brought close to the
ear of the dead. As [the Mulla] severely
jolts the dead, he says three times: 'Listen
and understand, hey you so and so! . . .'"

[Imam Khumayni]

"... Everyone is afraid of death; but
I am afraid of my own importunate life. How
horrifying it is when the death refuses to
come . . . An extraordinary power has kept
me in the prison of life under the hard and
heavy chains. If I were dead, I would be

taken to the mosque of Paris. By a touch of these wicked Arabs, [my dead body] would die once again. I cannot stand their shape."

[Sadeq Hedayat]

The perplexing multi-dimensional clash at Mrs. Khan's burial ceremony on the hot and humid Friday afternoon seemed to be quite tiring and sickening for everyone --- even for those who were responsible for the unnecessary length of the ceremony.

But, to me, it was mainly interesting to watch the conflict between the Sunnis and the Shi'ites, between the health authorities and the Muslims, and between the relatives of the dead and those engaged in the funeral business to unfold and resolve itself. Not that I am such a stone-hearted person who is not deeply saddened by the death of fellow human, it is anthropology which has made me a student who no longer thinks of the world as a place of living, but rather as a laboratory in which one must "participate" as an "observer". After reading Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* and Huntington and Metcalf's *Celebrations of Death*, I must confess my inability to a "non-anthropologist" at such occasions.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, right after the Muslim "Friday Prayer", the elegant hearse-limousine was already parked in front of the mosque. At first, I thought a Saudi

Prince or a high-ranking Muslim diplomat must have come to perform his Friday prayer or to donate some money for the building which is constantly suffering from financial problems. Soon, I realized that was not the case. Before the believers had an opportunity to disperse, the casket was carried on wheels to the mosque and everyone was encouraged to join in Salat al-Miyyit (the prayer of the dead). Some two hundred people stayed, and the majority left. Nevertheless, the assembly could be described "better than usual" --- thanks to Friday. "In usual times, no more than fifty gather", commented a participant.

"It is Hasan Ali Khan's mother", an Iranian said, "and God wanted her to have a wonderful funeral because she was a pious woman. That is why she died on a blessed night --- the night before Friday. Last night, right after I heard the news, I called Hasan Ali Khan. He did not know I had already been informed. I asked him if there was something I could do. He simply said that Bibi Kazimah was dead and he prayer would be at the mosque on East Side".

As I was expecting, the first problem arose right before Salat al-Mavyit: It was the clash of the Shi'ites and the Sunnis who say the prayer differently. The main difference is the numbers of Takbir (glorification of God): According to the Shi'ites, they must be five; according to the Sunnis, they are four. True that the Muslim

participants, the majority were Sunni and, therefore, according to the rules of liberal democracy, the opinion of the majority should be respected, it is equally true that the dead woman was a Shi'ite, and it is "the one God" --- Allah --- rather than the majority who is the law maker. The heart of the problem was not, however, the differences of the two versions. According to the principle of Taqiyah (dissimulation), a Shi'ite can, if he wishes to, say his prayer behind a Sunni Imam. This diplomatic gesture sanctioned by religion, we have been told, may help establish Islamic unity. One must admit, Taqiyah has thus far failed to fool the zealous Sunnis who still privately contrast Islam with Shi'ism and refuse to say their prayers behind a Shi'ite Imam. (The politicians of the Sunni countries who pay a visit to the Shi'ite Islamic Republic of Iran are practically exempt but they still show themselves by folding their hands in prayer!).

Mulla Khurshid, a tall and stocky Pakistani Shi'ite in his early forties, had been assigned by Hasan Ali Khan as "the authority". Was Mulla Khurshid expected to let a Sunni Imam lead the prayer? The Sunnis who are so used to leading in the mosque of Houston had such an expectation. But, Mulla Khurshid did not seem to be a man of compromise, and in his heart, he was probably saying: "To the hell with these Sunnis; we must make sure everything is done right."

We must be sure that that Mrs. Khan's mother will go to heaven with a correct prayer". As Mulla Khurshid led the prayer, the Sunnis were pissed. They whispered into each other's ears, and there were a few sarcastic smiles. But they were too civilized to feel sorry for a Shi'ite woman who would not be let into the Paradise because her prayer was not "performed correctly". In fact, as the young Shi'ite Imam stood in front, the Sunni consent was visible: All said the prayer with five Takbir.

The victory of the Shi'ites was tiring for everyone --- Shi'ites and Sunnis alike: There are two versions of Salat al-Mayyit, a short one and a long one. One is sufficient. And, in most cases, the short one which takes a minute or two is performed. For some reason, Mulla Khurshid chose the longer version. Perhaps, he wanted to please the relatives of the dead. Perhaps, he wanted to show the richness of the Shi'ite funeral rites to the Sunnis. Perhaps, he wanted others to recognize him as a learned man despite his age. Perhaps, there was a combination of all the above.

It is not sufficient to merely say that a Shi'ite Pakistani woman had died. It was the old mother of the honorable Hasan Ali Khan who so faithfully holds the sessions of "breast-beating" at every Ashura in his large house in Houston Texas. Khan's family is among the very few Shi'ite families who come to the mosque regularly. The

majority of the "Shi'ites" of Houston are Iranian; they are too "secular" to be regular attendants of religious ceremonies. Many have escaped from the religious atmosphere of their homeland. In fact, many do not even know where the mosque is situated, or, whether there is a mosque in Houston. And, the few Iranian "bearded" zealots who regularly attend the mosque "are the hired agents who come there to 'sell' (give away) the state-produced literature of the Islamic Republic rather than to say their prayers".

The participants of the funeral rite were as diverse as the interests of the Khan: The American grave-diggers burial experts, the Shi'ite fellow believers ranging from the most liberal to the most zealous and surprisingly young Mulla Khurshid who wanted to make sure everything is done according to the minute details of Shi'ite funeral rites, the Sunni Muslims who had all of a sudden realized their jurisprudential differences with the "Shi'ite brothers" and wanted everything done according to their regulations, and finally, the small number of the American friends of Mr. Khan who were expecting nothing so different from the funerals they had attended thus far. Everyone was disappointed --- even mad. But, finally, the task was accomplished and a sigh of relief followed as the Khan's mother settled down in her eternal home in order to come out

on the day of resurrection.

Who is Hasan Ali Khan? It was a few years ago when, on the night before the day of Ashura which marks the martyrdom of Husayn, an Iranian physician friend of mine asked whether I wanted to go to Mr. Khan's house for "breast-beating". At first, I took it as a joke. But, when he gave my unexpected laughter a serious look, I apologized and followed him. There were seven of us, and because Mr. Khan had moved the ceremony to a larger place without notifying all his friends, we remained behind the close doors. After all, because the language of the ceremony was mainly Urdu (with a little bit of English), the Iranian participation was too far from encouraged. In fact, the year before, several Iranians had chuckled when, for the first time, they had heard a Pakistani Mulla tell the tragic story of Karbala in the "outlandish language" with its ridiculously eclectic vocabulary. Their "this-worldly" mind had failed appreciated the spirit of the sacred gathering which Mr. Khan proudly called "soul purification". And, even my physician friend who had a sort of vague faith in such activities due to his "anti-scientistic" mysticism, agreed that Urdu was not a proper language for the story of Ashura "because it makes one laugh rather than cry"! He had another criticism as well: "The time for the obligatory prayer was passing, and when I excused myself to get up for

prayer, a Pakistani accused me of being less than respectful to the martyr Husayn".

So, I never succeeded to meet Mr. Khan, but I heard so much about him and his love for the family of the Apostle of Islam particularly Husayn for whom alone a Shi'ite must cry when he loses a member of his family. In Iran and the Arab countries, wailing for the dead is a moral imperative: Women tear their dresses, pull their own hair, sing sad songs, beat their faces and breasts, and the mourning intensifies as the corpse is being carried out of the house. Much wailing is left for during and after the burial. At this funeral, however, no one was crying. The victim had been quite old and sick, and the death was anticipated. And, of course, any flamoyant activity could look pretty weird in the eyes of the beholders.

From the mosque to the cemetary, the situation was nothing short of being "American": The lights on, the policemen escorting on the way, and the traffic . . .

Followed by some forty or fifty cars of different kinds, each representing the class status of its driver, the elegant hearse-limousine pulled onto the graveyard. By the way of comparison which is a bad habit of mine, all of a sudden, I remembered my own fear and trembling when, as a child, I regularly saw the caskets on the shoulders of the porters who rushed the corpse to the graveyard as they

chanted La Ilaha Illa Allah. Now, there was the mother of Mr. Khan's arrival -- as is a queen was being escorted by her servants to her new palace!

What a green graveyard! It is called "Forest Lawn Cemetary", and it is situated at 8701 Almeda Genoa. To those who are familiar with Muslim graveyards, at first glance, it looks like a small park where one likes to spend a day for a picnic. Mexicans on both sides, and the Muslims in the middle and on a plot of land absurdly small for the Muslim population of Houston. It is as if the majority of dead Muslims were shipped "back home", buried in non-Muslim cemeteries, or burned. But, we know that "burying a Muslim in the graveyard of the infidels and an infidel in the graveyard of Muslims is not acceptable" (problem #620). In a year or so, there will be no more room. And the question is why the Muslim population of Houston has thus far failed to get into the good business of "graves"? (I should take this back since, in the past two weeks, two Iranians have consulted me on whether they should start such a business and what would be the attitude of people; and of course, I have given them my blessings and support).

I quickly read the stones of a few graves: One Turk with the Latin inscription on his grave. (And, telling you the truth, Ataturk has badly separated the Turks from the rest of the Muslim world by having replaced the Arabic

script with the Latin script in Turkey). Several Iranians: The wife of Dr. Husayn Ahmadi -- the same Dr. Ahmadi who, once upon a time, was in charge of Prime Minister Hoveyda's office; the poor painter who died less than two months ago and his grave is still waiting for a stone; a young Iranian boy whose family I know; several Pakistanis; several Arabs; and a couple who must have died in an accident because they carry the same date of death . . . And, of course, it is easy to know that all those "foreigners" who prefer and can afford the expenses are transported to their homelands so that they can be with their relatives rather than joining the ranks of the eternal "strangers".

The grave Mr. Khan's mother was ready. It was amazingly deep -- too deep for a Muslim grave which must preferably be only as deep as the height of the grave-digger. "Here", someone commented, "the grave can be used for two persons (for instance, husband and wife). One may be buried on top of the other". The corpse was already washed and shrouded. There remained a few more things to be done before everyone could leave. Yes, only a few things, but, the clash was unavoidable unless, out of convenience, everyone would turn into a wishy washy easy going person.

As to what had already happened in the mortuary, I have little idea. According to reliable sources, the Islamic Society of Greater Houston has signed a contract with Mr.

Sherrel, the director of "Hyde Park Funeral Home" which is considered "the most reasonable funeral home of Houston". The initial fee is \$1100.00, but the actual cost ranges from \$1400.00 to \$3000.00. Mr. Sherrel who "is more familiar with Muslim funeral rites than the Muslims themselves are" does not mind a Muslim Ghassal (washer of the dead) prepare the Muslim corpses for burial. The person in charge of "washing" is an Indian Muslim by the name Shaykh Mahbub -- an engineer and a millionaire. "He is strictly a businessman who does not mix business with religion". There are others too, and according to an informat, "they do it as a charitable act rather than for money: Amin Marfani of Pakistan who is a public accountant; and Nusrat Hayat, another Pakistani, who sells insurance. The latter resides in Missoouri City.

"How do our dead find their way to the funeral home?", I ask a clerk of the Islamic Society:

"The hospital or the relatives of the dead call us. We give them the telephone number and the address of the funeral home and the cemetary. If they need a person to help, one of us goes. The relatives of the dead can themselves "wash the body" if they wish. Some do, and the majority do not have the heart. Nevertheless, we have the

hand-book of "do it yourself", and it is easy to follow the instructions. All the ingredients such as rose water and camphor are supplied in the funeral home. As you know, when a Muslim dies, it is the duty of all the living members of the community to perform the rite. Usually, everything is handled to the satisfaction because there are several volunteers. And brother Hafiz Iqbal (of Pakistan) supervises. We do our best to comfort the dead person and help him because it is the time he needs our help most".

What a blessing this "Islamic Society" is for all genuine and nominal Muslims. It is not only the place of worship, but an institution which performs the marriage and the funeral rite besides being a "Muslim United Nation" of some sort in which every Muslim echoes his loud opinions unto the deaf ears of others -- a "brotherly" gathering in which the rivals and the enemies may even say "hi" to each other. And, how pissed the Hizbullah is at the board of directors who is so careful of their political intrigues in the name of religion.

Well, let's go back to the story of the funeral and its problems of the funeral:

The second problem discovered by Mulla Khurshid was,

not the depth, but the direction of the grave. Hence, a serious clash between Mulla Khurshid and the grave-digger who had not been so precise. Of course, if the matter had been left in his hands, he would have made sure that the grave met the "preferred" depth and the "required" direction: He would have used his compass to make sure that Khan's mother would constantly face Mecca rather than some other city. Despite the fait accompli, Mulla Khurshid was bound to win. And he did. When such modifications are done by a bulldozer rather than a hand-shovel, it is easy for the angry grave-digger to swallow his anger, shut his mouth and wonder in his heart whether the direction of the grave makes any difference to the dead and the alive. But, rites are rites and they must be done right.

As everyone was wondering about the reason for the delay of the burial, the third problem made itself manifest: It was that of the American law which required that the corpse must be buried in a casket. (According to one informant, such is the 'tradition' rather than 'law'.) Mrs. Khan's casket, someone told me, "according to its proud manufacturer, would prevent the corpse from decomposing for fifty years". And, it did not sound right. But, why should a Muslim want his dead mother to refuse to decompose? Even Beethoven who "composed" throughout his life, began to "decompose" right after his death. True that, according

to Shi'ites beliefs, the corpse of the holy persons remains forever like a person in deep slumber (and goodness knows how many times I have heard such stories), Mr. Khan expected God rather than an American-made casket preserve his mother's beauty. And, more importantly, Islam does not allow burial with a casket. The right cheek of the dead must touch the soil. The bands of the shroud are loosened, and, at least in some parts of Iran such as Yazd, if the dead person is too old, a walking stick is put under his/her arms in order to facilitate standing when the two prosecuting angels (Nakir and Munkir) come to the grave for a most crucial "question and answer period".

Mulla Khurshid asked for some "boards". Obviously, he wanted to use them instead of a bed of soil under the corpse. The director of the cemetery who was about to lose his patience but did not want to offend his Muslim clients said, somewhat angrily: "We have had so many Muslim funerals, but we have never had these kinds of problems. Now, if you want boards, I will give you boards. But, it will cost you". He left and Mulla Khurshid left with him for discussion as some were asking: "How much would it cost?" I heard someone say: "None of your business!" "This is the problem of the Shi'ites, not ours", shouted someone to the director. For a moment, I expected fight to break out. But it did not -- thank God.

After a long and apparently angry disputation which could make any dead person sorry for having died, the matter was compromised in privacy. I guessed the solution: The corpse was going to be taken out of the casket, the inside bottom of the casket was to be emptied and covered with a thick layer of soil, the corpse was to be put back and the whole thing was buried. I proved to be partially right: Mr. Khan was among the very few who could help. It must have been a very painful experience for him to lift the head of his own dead mother as another relative lifted the legs of the corpse. After the corpse was removed from the casket, there was a paper underneath. And, there was a pillow under the head of Mr. Khan. When the paper and the pillow were removed, there was some straw. The straws were removed too, and the driver of the limousine took back them to the vehicle. The corpse was put back as her cheeks could be made to touch the wooden bottom of the casket. I was so touched to see Mr. Khan trying to put the pillow back under the head of his dead mother! It was as if he had not thus far realized the purpose of the lengthy argument. He was not allowed -- of course, and the pillow was removed once again.

As the casket was lowered into the grave, there was a sigh of relief on everyone's lips. They thought the task was about to be accomplished. The curious crowd got too

close to the grave, and the angry grave-digger shouted with a frightening voice: "Get away everyone! You are going to fall into the grave!" All the time, the women were tightly assembled in a corner, as if some external force had lumped them together like a bunch of sardines. I am sure if Maryam, the old female mortician of my village, had been present, the situation would have been drastically different.

I put it so simply, and you may think it was a simple matter. It was not.

First of all, since it was a woman's funeral, only the women and some close kin (son-in-law being the prime choice) were allowed to handle the matter. And, who wanted to do that? The American funeral experts were begging in their heart for a reasonable explanation despite the fact that, by then, they were almost sure that Shi'ite Muslims are savage and stupid. The participants were too tired, but they still cared to see everything is done properly. As the casket was finally put inside the grave, Mulla Khurshid followed it in order to whisper the last Arabic words into the ear of Mr. Khan's mother. Someone among the funeral experts angrily shouted at him: "What are you doing man . . ."?! He wanted to say: "Are you stupid or something?" but he swallowed his words and instead, he said: "Get out of here right now, or

I am going to call the police. It is against the law. It is against heath. It is against everything". Mulla Khurshid had to compromise and sit at the grave rather than standing in it, to speak somewhat more loudly than usual to the corpse rather than to whisper. He recited the following as the son-in-law of Mrs. Khan stood on the "head side" of the casket and raised his right arm toward Mulla Khurshid. (By doing so, the son-in-law was acting as an antenna for transmitting the message of Mulla Khurshid:

"Listen lady (He named the woman) the daughter of (he named her father) and understand! Are you still on the promise on which you were when you left us? Do you witness that there is no god but God who is one and without a partner, and that Muhammad, salutations of God be to him and his relatives, is His servant and messenger and the master of prophets and the last of his messengers? And that Ali is the king of the believers and master of successors and he is the Imam whose obedience is made incumbent by God upon those who live in the world? And that Hasan, Husayn, Ali son of Husayn, Muhammad son of Ali, Ja'far son of Muhammad, Musa son of Ja'far, Ali son Musa, Muhammad

son of Ali, Ali son of Muhammad, Hasan son of Ali, and "the still living one" Mahdi the leader, salutations of God be upon them all, are all Imams of the believers and the reasons of God for all men and they are your Imams who guided you to become a pious person? Oh [lady!] the daughter of so and so! When approached by the two angels who are close to God and are sent by Him who is great and mighty and they ask from you about your God and your prophet and your religion and your Book and your Qiblah and your Imams, you must not fear nor be sad, and in response to them, say: 'Allah is my God. Muhammad, salutations of God be upon him and his relatives, is my prophet. Islam is my religion . Quran is my book. Ka'bah is my Qiblah . . . Ali is . . . (He repeated the same names with more attributes.) . . . And, you should know that Allah . . . is the best God and Muhammad is the best . . . (He repeated the same names.) . . . Death is truth, resurrection is truth, the bridge [over hell and heaven] is truth . . . Did you understand, lady so and so? (*)

Mulla Khurshid ended the long and tiring monologue with the prayer asking God to make the earth comfortable for her and to take her soul to Paradise. The faces of the Sunnis were red as they heard all these Shite rhetorics addressed to a dead Shi'ite. But no one said anything.

Not every non-Muslim knows what kind of fear and trembling this long monologue causes for the Shi'ites who speak Arabic! Unless, by the power of the Almighty, one develops a linguistic ability as soon as he dies, the non-Arab Shi'ite deads are at the threshold of a crucial disadvantage. How can they understand Arabic if, in their life, they have never learned it? To make the matter worse, the two angels as well ask their questions in Arabic! The story goes that a Lur tribesman was being questioned in his grave by the two angels. "Man Rabbuk (Who is your God?)", one angel asks in Arabic. "Man Chinam Rab China (How the hell do I know what Rab (God) is", the Lur answers. Man Rasuluk (who is your prophet?), asks the other angel, again in Arabic. In his native dialect, the Lur says that he does not understand. At this point, they hit him on the head with a club. "Now I know why no one wants to leave that bad world and die", the Lur says, "it is because of your bad treatment"!

Again, there is a story that, during the reign of the Shah, a very pious Muslim is being questioned in his grave

by the two angels.

- Who is your God?
- His Majesty the Shahinshah!
- What is your religion?
- The "White Revolution"!
- What is your holy book?
- Inqilab -e- Sifid (Shah's literary masterpiece). Upon

this, the angels raise their club to hit the man on the head. But God intervenes:

- My true servant! What is the matter with you?
- I am sorry God, I thought the two were SAVAK agents!

These meaningful jokes aside, the first night of the dead is supposed to be a frightening experience for him/her. If, on that night, Ali, Fatimah or some other "noble spirit" does not come to help the Shi'ite, the victim may fall into the fire of hell. In fact, according to the Shi'ites who call themselves Firqah -e- Najiyah (the saved group), the passport to Paradise is nothing but the love of Ali and his children. Thus, a Shi'ite has nothing to fear if he or she has died as a Shi'ite. And, it is a big "if" indeed!! There are stories of those who apparently lived as Shi'ites, but, as soon as Israel (the angel of death) squeezes the life out of their throat, they change their religion into Judaism and Christianity. Hence, the hell-fire without questioning. In fact, "the question and

answer period" is exclusive to those who are qualified to take the exam. The angels do not waste their times on every featherless bi-ped!

In his Gulistan, Sa'di tells the story of a dead brick-layer who, in a dream, tells his alive friend that all the stories the Mullahs had told him about the first night of the grave, the questions, the thin and shakey bridge over the hell , and what have you were false. "I was standing on the ladder laying bricks", he says, "when all of a sudden, I fell straightly into hell. That was the only choice"!

Now, it is time to end the story with a happy ending.

Following a recitation of the Quran, everyone left the realm of death for that of life.

It may sound stupid, but I could not help wondering whether Mr. Khan's mother was wearing makeup like the American dead do, whether a similar type of dispute and hard feeling had taken place in the funeral home over the issue of "shroud", and finally, whether I wanted to die and be buried in the United States, or in my own hometown where one's death causes a few hearts to break but it does not bring about hard feelings.

While I understand why, in Khumayni's Tawdih al-Masa'il, there are more than a hundred and twenty articles of jurisprudence about funeral rites, I know very well why, in Paris, Sadeq Hedayat was not as much worried

about death as he was about his funeral.

CHAPTER 5

MARRIAGE IN HOUSTON

This paper studies "rites of passage", particularly marriage and divorce, among the Iranians living in Houston Texas in the mid 1980's. It attempts to discover the social, political and economic patterns governing such unions and break ups. It also compares and contrasts them with what can roughly be called "traditional marriage and divorce" inside Iran. If the study is written for the most part in first person singular pronoun, I need not apologize; I have been directly involved in almost all of them both as the performer of the rite as well as a participant observer. Needless to say that all cases treated in this study are those in which at least one of the parties was (at least in name if not also in practice) a Shi'ite Muslim from Iran.

In Shi'ite jurisprudence as well as in Shi'ite communities, two quite distinct types of marriage have been recognized: "Permanent" and "temporary". In both cases, the male party pays (or promises to pay "when he can" or "when she requests") an amount of money (or something of value) to the female; it is called mahr or sadaq, and it automatically becomes "her" property, unless she prefers not to take it or to give it back to her husband.

Theoretically, the two types of marriages are distinguished from one another by the fact that in the

former case it is "divorce" or death of one of the two parties which ends the term of the marriage; in the latter case, a definite period is assigned to the marriage, and at the end of the term, the marriage is automatically nullified. Again theoretically, in both cases the children enjoy full rights as persons of legitimate birth and have equal rights in inheriting from their parents. In both cases, marriage is a contract, theoretically verbal and at least in the case of "permanent marriage" written between a couple. In both cases, a "formula" is required to be "read" by one or both of the couple, or by their "proxy", preferably in Arabic and importantly, it must be read in the past tense: "I married you to myself" and "I accepted the marriage", or " I married my female principal to my male principal for the period of six weeks and for the amount of \$6.00" ... as the case require. Conditions must be negotiated before the formula is read, and *pacta sunt servanda*. A temporary wife, however, is no way equal to a permanent one.

In social terms, there are considerable differences between the two types of marriage. While a man takes a permanent wife to organize a family, a temporary wife may have one or a combination of several functions: A man may not be able to afford the expenses of permanent marriage, or, even though he is married, may have appetite for

"extra-marital" sex. Temporary marriage offers a solution to his sexual problems. By paying a fee to which the woman consents, he can marry her for a few hours or even a few years. And of course, they may negotiate and settle all possible emerging problems. Although it does not happen as frequently, an unmarried woman may wish to sleep with a man of her choice. The formula of temporary marriage can legitimize her sexual activity with her temporary husband.

Temporary marriage has traditionally been practiced in Iran as well as in other Shi'ite communities of the world. The vicinities of the holy shrines of Qumm and Mashad are popularly believed to be centers in which such men and women meet. Men must be careful not to mistake in their reconnaissance which may result in embarrassment; and there is always some risk involved: it is like approaching ladies of the night except that the degree of "willingness" a woman displays is much more restricted by social etiquette. The interaction works out in the form of a gradually developing verbal exchange, until certainty is reached.

Theoretically, jurisprudence makes it impossible for the young woman (those who have not reached their menopause) to make temporary marriage into a business. After the termination of each marriage, she must observe three months of "waiting period" to make sure she is not pregnant, and if she is, to know who the father of her baby is. Old women

who no longer get pregnant are of course exempt from the "waiting period". In practice, it is questionable whether these financially poor women observe this period; their words must be taken for it that they do.

Among the Shi'ites of the United States as well, particularly among Shi'ite Black Muslims and the orthodox Shi'ite students from Iran, the temporary marriage is practiced. In contrast to Black Shi'ites who are somewhat open to the issue (in one case, an informant, Hitaji Abd al-Aziz, told her story and the stories of many others very openly and sincerely; and for example another "sister" who had invited me for dinner showed me the Fatwa of Ayatullah Abu al-Qasim Khu'i with the instructions of arranging such marriage, and then, she went on to tell me how wonderful it was and asking me if I had ever done it), the Iranian orthodox Shi'ites keep the information to themselves, or at the most, they pass it to a trusted friend. Several informants told me that the female party is almost always American and often black. There is a stigma attached to temporary marriage, and it is indeed socially very embarrassing for an Iranian woman to have been subject to temporary marriage. Under the influence of modern social norms, liberal women even prefer to merely sleep with the man of choice rather than to be his wife for a definite term.

Temporary marriage thus falls out of the category of the marriages in which I have been involved as "performer of the ceremony", and therefore, I limit myself to a few comments about its function.

Marriage is not of course always for sex; it is indeed for convenience. In the Muslim society where separation of sexes is seriously practiced, for instance, a young man is hired to tutor a married woman who has a little daughter. They need to sit in a room by themselves, they may need to touch each other's hands, and the possibility of eye-contact is always there. To solve the religious problem, the little girl may be technically married to the tutor in order to make the female pupil his technical mother-in-law. This type of marriage is seldom spoken of but its practice is quite frequent. The contract is most often verbal rather than written, but in some cases, the account of the deal is written and then nullified at the end of the term. In the early 1970's when I was a book binder for a public library in Yazd, I observed such a contract among the pages of an old book. It was very small; the names of the couple as well as the amount of dower, and the length of the term appeared on the contract. On the back of the contract, the date of divorce and the testimony of the husband that "she was Ghayr Madkhulah" (lit: not entered into, still a virgin) were registered.

Not all the marriage which takes place among Iranian exiles are religious. In the cases in which one of the two parties is a permanent resident or a citizen, a trip to the court house or to justice of the peace can establish the bond. Most of such marriages however must be put in the category which I have termed Izdiwaj -e- Green Karti (Green Card marriage). The main -- if not the sole -- purpose of such marriages is to obtain permanent residence in the United States. One party must be a citizen or at least a permanent resident for the marriage to serve its purpose. And of course, there is no Muslim ceremony involved. The marriage is "American", and indeed, Iranians refer to it as Izdiwaj -e- Amerika'i. It takes place in a church or, more often, in a court or by the justice of the peace. Legally, the two parties must share a place a residence; but practically, they may live in different houses or they may live together. (After the recent legal crackdown on these fake marriages, the two parties are very careful. In case an immigration officer knocks at the door, there must be some evidence that they live together. If suspected, they may be asked some intimate questions after they are isolated for a brief period: "On what side of the bed does he or she sleep?", " How often do you make love?" . . .)

Most often the term of a "Green Card Marriage" ends when the applicant receives his or her permanent residence.

They may delay separation to make sure that the authorities are no longer after them. There is often some money involved; it is paid by the party seeking permanent residence and it goes to the pocket of the person who has married him or her for that purpose. Several women who were married as such informed me that their so-called husbands were "gay". This is to make sure that no unwanted sex will be involved.

Again, this kind of marriage falls out of the category of the serious marriages in which I have been acting as "performer", but one interesting case is worth mentioning: Mrs. Muhajiri (not the real name) has been happily married to another Iranian for 34 years. She has three children, all happily married. But she wishes to obtain permanent residence. Her husband who used to be in the United States is currently in Iran. The couple have agreed on the phone to divorce, but not because they no longer wish to live together or they no longer like each other. Quite the contrary. The divorce is expected to serve as the initial stage of planning a happy married life in the United States. Once divorced, she can have a green card marriage. Then, she can divorce her American husband and remarry her real husband. Consequently, the latter, as a spouse of an American citizen can obtain a permanent visa to join her. This is the plan, and if it works, she will no longer be so

miserable.

Indeed, there is little reason for the plan not to work: She is extremely beautiful and she will have no difficulty in fooling a naive American man even if she does not indeed wants to pay someone for a fake "I do". Such marriages are not of course limited to Iranians. I am aware of a similar case in Lawrence, Kansas: She was a student from Eastern Europe, married and had two children in her country. She had divorced her husband in order to facilitate obtaining a student visa. In Lawrence, she married a wealthy red-neck and somehow managed to acquire some of his wealth without giving him any children. Soon, she asked her two children to join her for visit. They did. Quarrels developed and the red-neck divorced her, reportedly on the grounds that she was caught red-handed in a love affair with an Algerian guy. She and her Algerian lover moved to a new location. Meanwhile, she married her first husband (long distance marriage, marriage by proxy) and invited him to come to the United States. As this woman needed some patience, so does Mrs. Muhajiri.

Initially, two important facts must be kept in mind: First, if in the sixties and the seventies the overwhelming majority of Iranians living in the United States could adequately be put in the category of "students", in the eighties, they can properly be categorized as "exiles" and "

refugees" of some sort. Second, the situation of the Iranians of the eighties in Houston is an extraordinary social situation working its way toward adjustment and adaptation -- toward forming a stable "community" of exiles which can operate like others formed in the United States by exiles and refugees of other countries many years ago.

As for the first fact, the fall of the Iranian monarchy and the subsequent rise of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (1978-9) was accompanied with two opposing flows: Many Iranians (particularly students) living outside in the U.S. went back home to try their luck under the new system; the dissatisfied and the endangered found their way out of Iran in search of temporary and permanent homes. Many of course came to the United States. Among the second group, a considerable number are also those who had formerly lived in the United States, had gone to Iran during the revolution and, as the new situation proved itself to be bad for them, made a U-turn and came back.

The perplexity and lack of adjustment among these Iranians is perhaps most evident at the time of passage rites: A child is born and the parents do not know how to obtain an Iranian birth certificate or if there is any ritual for "baptizing" them! (There is not of course such a thing. Muslim male children are only to be circumcized). A couple wants to get married in Iranian tradition and they

have to call "those who have done it before" in order to know what to do. When someone dies, relatives (if there are any of them here) and friends do not know what to do. Mordeh shuri (undertaking) has traditionally been a degrading task in Iran. This is despite the fact that in Muslim jurisprudence when someone dies, unless one person volunteers to take the job, it is the duty of all members of the community to prepare for the funeral which involves washing and shrouding of the corpse as well as its burial in a proper place. Death in exile, therefore involves a great deal of embarrassment because the client wants to avoid offending the one whom he thinks is a potential candidate.

Anthropologists, of course, may have good reasons to bring all "rites of passage" under one heading. If nothing else, they all have to do with one's passage from one stage to another. Yet, it is interesting how Iranians set apart those rites which have to do with life from those which are concerned with death. (For instance, although many deaths have occurred among Iranians of Houston since my arrival in the city, I, known for performing the rite of marriage, have never been asked to (even give advice for) the funeral rite -- let alone to perform it. It is as if I am associated with life and have to be kept separate from death).

Since a few month after my arrival in Houston (1981), I have been performing marriage ceremonies for the Shi'ite

Muslim Iranians in Houston, Texas. Although I have not kept statistics, I must have performed more than a hundred of them. There are several ways to categorize these marriages: In the overwhelming majority of them, both parties have been Iranian. In some, the bride or the groom was non-Iranian. They can also be categorized in terms of details: Some were quite elaborate, attended by several hundreds; the others simple, and in one case, there was no one but the two essential parties and two persons as witnesses. The majority were somewhat in-between: all the accessible close friends and members of the two families were present. For the majority, it was the first marriage; there were however some which involved divorcees. Majority of them were held at the residence of either the bride and the groom as it is customary in Iran. Many also were held in a club house or hotel. None were in a Muslim religious institution such as a mosque. One was held in a Catholic church. A few involved large sums of money or property as the so-called mahr, as it is customary in Iran. In the majority of cases, however, money was not the issue. From the occupational and economic stand-point, there was a wide range from the case of two poor students who decided that marriage would help both of them in all aspects including financial, to a rich businessman.

In sum, then, to recapitulate: there are two types of

marriage for Shi'ites: Nikah -e- Da'im (Permanent) and Mut'ah or Sighah (concubine or temporary). Each has a different formula that is read by either of the two parties involved or both of them, or most commonly a religious proxy (representing both parties) or two proxies (each representing one side of the pact). Mut'ah was legally banned in Iran during Pahlavi rule, but it continued to be practiced where the secular legal authorities were unable to detect. The social function of the two types are quite different: In the former case, the man and the woman marry one another for an indefinite term; death or divorce separates the two. The wife has full legal right to inherit from her husband and vice versa. In the latter case, the condition of a specified time period that the union may last, is included in the formula; the two do not inherit from one another. In terms of social function, temporary marriage is most often -- but not necessarily always -- for temporary sexual pleasure. I said not necessarily, because there are other reasons for such marriage as well, the description of which shall soon follow. In both cases, the children are legitimate and have full right to inheritance.

In a Muslim society, there is a sharp line separating the two sexes. The opposite sexes may not cross the boundary; otherwise, there is "danger" in the general anthropological sense of the term. This is not the place to

discuss this boundary in detail. Suffice it to say, if two persons of the opposite sex who are not close kin must for some reason come in contact with one another, they must be technically "married". In such cases, temporary marriage plays a facilitating role. Sexual activity does not necessarily take place between the two. For example, a widow who has an infant daughter wants to travel with a man. She can technically get the baby temporarily married to the man. She herself technically becomes his mother in law and the matter is solved. A rich Muslim man employs a female servant. He may technically make her his wife by seeking her agreement and reciting the formula. Many other examples can be provided. The most notorious social function of temporary marriage however is not unlike that of prostitution. (There are of course reservations: the woman agrees to be a man's wife for an hour, a day or longer or shorter. When the time is up, the marriage term is up. Theoretically, if she has not passed the age of being able to get pregnant, the woman is responsible to observe a "waiting period" for paternal certainty of the possible child.)

Since all the marriages involved in this study have been "forever", in this study however, we shall not have very much to do with temporary marriage which is being also practised among the Shi'ite Muslims of the United States as

well. Nevertheless, when necessary, I have made use of its technicality as my first example shall reveal.

TEMPORARY MARRIAGE FORMULA FOR PERMANENT MARRIAGE:

My unexpected career began in a weekly Islamic gathering where a friend asked me about the laws of marriage. A few weeks later, he asked me on the phone whether I could perform a ceremony between two of his friends. At first, I was reluctant, but he insisted that it was for a good cause. The groom, about thirty, was an Iranian Shi'ite Muslim and the bride, a few years younger, a Catholic from South America. They could not be pronounced permanently husband and wife according to Shi'ite jurisprudence unless the bride consented to religious conversion. Before I asked her anything about the matter, she whispered to me that she wanted to keep her religion. I had to agree. A Shi'ite man can, of course, temporarily marry a woman from among "the people of the Book" (Jews and Christians, and, according to most but not all jurists, Zoroastrians). She met this requirement, but, of course, I had not been asked to perform a temporary marriage ceremony. I came up with a clever idea to both save myself from embarrassment and make the occasion a very happy one: When everyone was ready and the couple were sitting at the bridal display (to be described later), I asked them -- as is the

necessary technical preliminary -- whether they accepted me as their proxy. The answers were "Yes". I asked the groom what he would give the bride as mahr. "A volume of the Quran and one ounce of Gold", he said in a soft voice. I asked the bride if she consented to the amount. Smilingly she said she was. Then I told the bride and the groom that I only had the authority to pronounce them man and wife for the fixed period of ninety years only. "After this period", I added, "you may call me to perform another ceremony for another ninety years!". Unaware of the technical difficulty that had obliged me to fixing the period, they interpreted it as a word of good omen. Everyone was happy and a small but nice celebration of dance and dinner followed.

Setting aside the particularity of the religion of the bride, it was a classic Iranian marriage ceremony in some respects and different from it in some ways. It was held in the House of the bride and the bridal display was superbly Iranian: A white silk cloth on the floor near the wall. A large mirror facing the cloth; its back toward Mecca, toward which Muslims stand for prayer. On the cloth, bread (symbolizing life and blessing), cheese, green vegetable (symbolizing growth and happiness), nuts and eggs (symbols of fertility), plenty of sweets and cookies, a jar of honey so that the bride and the groom could each dip a little finger in and put it in each other's mouth (symbolizing a

sweet shared life), Janamaz and Muhr, and of course, the Holy Quran. As I recited the formula, four married women (symbolizing auspiciousness) held a white cloth like a canopy over the head of the bride and the groom who were sitting on two pillows facing the mirror, while a fifth married woman pulverized two sugar cones over the cloth. Every time I uttered the names of the couple, the sugar grinder hit the two sugar cones on each other and wished them good luck. A sixth married woman had a threaded needle and pretended to be sewing the canopy; she was ritually locking, not only the bride and the groom together, but the tongue of the "jealous mother in-law" of the bride too.

But there were some breaches of the tradition: Men and women were in the same room, the bride and the groom sat together on two pillows in front of the bridal display and of course, there was plenty of alcohol for the celebration following the ceremony. The couple had known each other for four years and they were, as I discovered later, actually living in the same apartment.

It took a few month for my fame and reputation to establish itself through the word of mouth. The community seemed to be in bad need of such person ever since Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi had left his permanent residence as well as such ceremonial services to try his luck in the Islamic politics of Iran. The word spread much faster than I

expected. At the present, on some weekends, I have more than one ceremony to perform. On one Saturday, I did four; three in Houston and one in Austin.

Politics seldom played a role in these marriages. Nevertheless, it made its appearance hither and thither. A father insisted that the bridewealth of his daughter, 2500 gold coins suggesting 2500 years of Iranian monarchy must be paid in Pahlavi gold coins, not in any other way. Told that such amount of gold Pahlavi coins are difficult to get, he said somewhat angrily and and sadly that his hope for the return of the Pahlavi dynasty to the Peacock Throne was still alive. More than once, I have been criticized: why do I not perform the ceremony in Persian which is "our national language"? My answer was always the same: "I do it in three languages; Persian, Arabic and English so that no one will be left out. Arabic is the language of our religion; Persian is our mother tongue and of course, there are always American guests who want to know that I am doing". They did not mind English and thought it was necessary. "But why Arabic? We are not Arab and do not understand Arabic". In some cases a few words of insult to the Arabs "who ruined our culture and devastated our civilization in the name of Islam" followed. The real target of these comments, however, was the Islamic Republic which they considered an "extension of the Arab conquest of Iran".

For the sake of comparison and contrast, in a Hizbullah marriage ceremony held in the Eastside Mosque of Houston which I participated before I become a performer, there was a large color picture of Khumayni displayed despite criticism of the Sunni authorities that an image should not be in the house of God. Men and women (who were all adequately covered) sat separately. The bride sat amidst the women and she could not be seen. The groom was surrounded by his male friends and relatives. A few slogans of "death to America" and "death to Israel" were chanted, of course in Persian. A Pakistani Shi'ite read the marriage formula behind the unnecessary microphone which made strange noises. There were no Sunni participants and as "the house of God is not the place of lahw (music, singing, dance, games etc.)", no music or dance. But plenty of cookies and sweets. Then we all went to the house of the bride where the marriage ceremony was performed once again, this time by an Iranian couple, that is a husband and his wife. But this time in women's quarter. I had personally never seen a woman performer. A show of Islamic women's lib perhaps? Not necessarily. A woman can do that too. And, after all, while it was true that the bride and the groom were both hizbullahi, they were nonetheless "Iranian", and they wanted to have the ceremony done in front of the elaborate bridal display too. (Such was not possible in the

Sunni-non-Iranian mosque).

After the ceremony which took no more than a minute, following a cheer from women's quarter, everybody sat chatting. Politics and Islam; Islam and politics. Male and female together but with a few inches of distance. Suddenly a cassette tape recorder began to play Persian Music. The child who had pushed the button was criticised. But of course, almost everyone wanted the music. So it continued to play. A Turkish song followed (the bride's mother was from the Turkish province of Azarbaayjan), and the zealous Muslims began to get used to this haram, this art which has been condemned in Islamic jurisprudence. A male friend of mine and I began to dance. We knew that nothing would happen and that others, even if their tongues were saying something, their hearts were admiring our courage. Finding an excuse that "a female friend of mine wants to come in but she has no Islamic cover", I borrowed the veil of Dr. Yazdi's wife, Suran. I put on the veil and pretended to be a traditional Muslim woman. A musical dialogue between my dance partner and I was accompanied by everyone's clap:

- "I shall not carry a Mulla".

- "Why not?"

- "Mulla makes you bend down".

- "I shall not marry a colonel".

- "Why not?"

- "He does it with cannon and gun".

- "I shall not marry an army general". - "Why not?"

- "He does it in the Jeep".

- "I shall not marry an butcher".

- "Why not"?

" He makes one tired".

.....

A few faces turned red at first, but were eventually taken over by laughters. The camera-man took photos. A few other shoulders began to shake with the music of our dialogue. Women gradually began to move into their quarter where dancing and clapping began to follow too. We, the men, were deprived of the pleasure, but the groom went in to the women's room to dance; apparently with the bride.

At the end of the party, the family thanked us (of course quietly) for having warmed the party up, but, later on, we were bitterly criticised by the hizbullah participants including the bride and the groom both of whom presently work in the de facto Iranian Embassy in Washington DC.

A SHORT-LIVED MARRIAGE

Not all the marriages have a happy ending. Some do not even last a year. Consider, for instance the following case. (I have changed the names of the parties involved).

Rustam is a handsome man in his late thirties. Tall,

lighter than average Iranians with a few grey hair on both sides of his head, he speaks with the sweet Kermanshahi accent. The son of a landowner, he lived, and perhaps studied, for some years in Paris. At the time he married Beheshteh, he had just bought one fourth of a hamburger stand in a small city of Texas. This was all he had in the world.

Beheshteh was of a different type. The beautiful (and the only) daughter of a businessman from Tehran, she was first married to a well-to-do Englishman. The marriage did not work and she got a divorce and moved to the United States to join her brothers. She had got used to expensive habits: horse-riding, wearing expensive dresses and attending soirees. She owned some real estate which provided her income.

One night, at a party, sitting with her family (including her mother), the handsome Rustam came to the table, lit her cigarette and asked for a dance. He was refused and she was blamed by her mother for having refused such a gentleman. When Rustam came for the second time, she accepted the invitation to dance with him. They, I am told, did not see each other again for a long time.

According to Rustam,

" [the family] asked a female relative of mine about me. One day, I went to visit them with that

female relative. Beheshteh's father had just come from Iran for visit. They immediately began asking me why I had remained single. I told them that I had married an American woman, had a little daughter and a green card; but we had not gotten along so I had to divorce her".

Rustam visits the family several times. The father, a long time playboy who had divorced Beheshteh's mother many years ago to marry someone much younger but was still in touch with the family, was visiting his daughter after more than a decade. He wanted to do his daughter a favour. What could be better than fixing her up with a good husband? And here was the handsome Rustam. He made a phone call to Iran to find out who the family of Rustam are. It seemed that the son in law he was looking for in heavens happened to be on the earth: good rich family, polite... and what have you. Although he had no money in the United States, he would make some if he were assisted by the good family of his wife; and of course, he was rich in Iran.

One day, Rustam is seriously approached by Beheshteh's father and encouraged to ask for Beheshtah's hand in marriage. Rustam decides to speak with her. Beheshteh says that she "is not the type, we could only remain friends". They agree. The father, a bazaari from Tehran, has made up his mind that the two are made for one another. So, he begins working on his daughter. The argument turns into

talk, the talk into tears and the tears into agreement. She is persuaded that she must compromise and hope for a happy life with a "zealous Kermanshahi husband who has much to offer".

According to Rustam,

"There was no hope. I knew that Beheshteh was not going to marry me. One day, at six o'clock in the morning, her father called me. I was still asleep when I took the receiver. " My son in law! Congratulations! Last night, she agreed and every thing is ready. We are waiting for the moment." I was both shocked and happy. But, I started trembling with the heavy responsibility which was to follow. I had no money for the wedding. I was not sure if I was able to make her happy. ... I fell asleep again. When I finally woke up, I went to visit the family in my ordinary clothes. By not dressing up, I wanted to somewhat discourage them from what they were doing. But to no avail. They were going to come to our house to talk about the arrangements".

At this time, perhaps in anticipation of the occasion, Rustam was living in Houston in the house of his relatives. His partners were mad at him because he was not doing his share of the work selling or cooking hamburgers. They wanted to get rid of him by paying him his share.

The following night, the family of Beheshteh came over. Of course, Beheshteh was not with them. (A good girl does not participate in such assembly of the elders who decide on such matters). The logic of Beheshteh's father was simple:

"One should not be too honest about his financial situation. One should always exaggerate a little. If you own one quarter of a hamburger joint, say that you own a restaurant. After you marry my daughter, you will be my son. I will do for you what I have done for my own sons. You should not worry about money matters. Make sure you offer a good amount of mahr -- the amount that no one has ever paid and no one has ever received".

Rustam feels that he has found the wife whom he has been searching in heaven for. The agreement is of course made right on the spot.

When I was asked to perform the wedding for this couple, I was somewhat surprised. It was like an emergency call. Normally, I get ten days notice at least. And I usually heard rumours a month before the invitation. But this time, it was such a short notice that I was somewhat offended. It was as if I had the right to have known in advance.

The apartment was neatly decorated. The bridal display was set on the floor in good taste. Shortly after I

arrived, the man who proved to be Beheshteh's father took me to the room as if he did not want others to know for what purpose I had gone there. Very charismatic fellow with hypnotic eyes -- eyes that could sell you what you really did not need. In matter of minutes, I found him a warm fellow -- one of those who make you feel you have known them all your life. As he began to instruct me how to write the contract, I told him I knew my job. He was dominating and bossy. " Why?" I asked myself, " Should I write everything down before? I usually do it after the ceremony". Then I decided that this was to be done anyway and I could prepare it to be only signed later by the parties and by myself.

The bride was in the bedroom preparing herself (or someone was preparing her). The groom had not arrived yet. After an hour, he came in. Very impressive. I had never seen him before. I however had heard that Beheshteh "has a boyfriend of some sort in California who he visits every now and then". "It must be him", I said to myself.

The mother of the bride came out of the bedroom with a crystal bowl of water in which several green leaves were floating. She put it in the middle of the bridal display. I had seen this symbolic item before but I had never interpreted it the way I subconsciously did that day. "Cut leaves in a bowl of water? They can very well symbolize

short life. Why not a plant in a water?" Then I blamed myself for the thought.

When everyone was ready, I began the sermon. I reminded them of their responsibilities. Then, as is my custom to say something funny to disrupt the seriousness that understandably surrounds such occasions, I offered my car key to the groom and the bride asking them if they wished to run away before I put the responsibility on their shoulders. Everyone laughed. And the bride whispered something into the groom's ears. I thought, she is telling him that I was "just joking".

They both formally accepted me as their religious proxy and I pronounced them husband and wife. At night, a nice party was held in large club. Everything looked normal.

Three days later, I received a telephone call from Beheshteh's father who wanted to see me in person. Curious as I am, I welcomed the opportunity. We, the father, Beheshteh and I, sat down at a cafe' table. He began with a long introduction of himself. Beheshteh did not look happy at all. "Get right to the matter daddy; he does not have too much time". She said it somewhat angrily.

I found out that the marriage had not worked. In a matter of a few minutes, Rustam was pictured as a liar who had deceived the family. To tell the truth, I blamed myself for having underestimated the quiet and polite Rustam.

After all, I am an anthropologist who is expected to read beneath the surface of human behaviour. As he found me somewhat persuaded of the injustice committed by the ingrate Rustam, the father wanted me to nullify the marriage and he was ready to "take care of me" -meaning to reward me with some money. I told him that the matter was not that simple." I must talk to Rustam. He is the one who may or may not accept me as his proxy. Besides that, he must pay the mahr he has promised". He wanted to impress me with his generosity. So, he said that money was not important to him. I got somewhat suspicious but repeated that the matter was not in my hand. He gave me Rustam's phone number and advised me what to ask him.

The following day, I called Rustam. He sounded very unhappy. He also said that he wanted to see me in person and suggested that I should go to his house.

I went to Rustam's house for dinner. I was very alert and cautious. "He must be a man of magical power to have deceived such a magical person", I thought to myself.

We waited for the "female relative" who, as I had been told, "had played a crucial role in the process which had led to the unhappy marriage". Indeed, she had not. She was merely unfortunate enough to have conveyed the message back and forth between Rustam and Beheshteh's family. As a person who knew both Beheshteh and Rustam, she had warned

the naive Rustam about what he was doing to his life.

It was then, that I got the whole picture. Rustam proved to be a victim of circumstances:

"I have married this woman and I wanted to make her happy. I have spent all what I had and have borrowed some money from friends. Now, I have neither the money nor the wife. Instead, I have debts that I must pay and my pride is badly hurt. It was agreed that after the wedding, I would be given three months to rent a house, move out of my one bedroom apartment and prepare to take my bride home. Right after the wedding, the father of Beheshteh insisted that I should immediately take the hand of my wife and take her to where I was living. I told him that I was not ready. Again he insisted. I took the first flight to (the little Texas town). I decorated my apartment and wrote a large sign welcoming her to my life. Then I flew back to Houston. Beheshteh and I flew to the town. As soon as she arrived in my apartment, she attacked me with the harshest words one may use to insult a man. She did not let me to touch her. She screamed more than fifty times. She picked up the phone and call her father in Los Angeles. Then, she ran out of the apartment to go to the airport. I followed her. She took a flight and I took the following one. And here I

am. Her father flew back from Los Angeles. We quarrelled with one another over the phone. It is as if he had forgotten all his promises. Last night, I wanted to hit my head onto the cement wall. I do not want to divorce her. If they want divorce, they must pay for damages they have done to my life. I am ready to take them to court. Even Beheshteh's brother agrees that I have done no wrong. He was here this morning and he offered his deep sympathy".

I felt very sorry for Rustam. The following day, I called Beheshteh's father to tell him the story. I said to him that according to my human judgement, Rustam was a reasonable person. He agreed but added that the two were not fit for one another. I agreed. "But you see", I interrupted his unnecessary speech, "the poor guy is badly damaged psychologically and financially. You told me that money was no object. It is time to prove your words by secretly putting some money in Rustam's hand and kindly asking him to agree to a divorce". The answer was typical: "Ma baj beh kasi namidim (We do not pay tribute to anyone). To which I diplomatically replied, "call it help, not tribute. It is the money that matters not the name by which you call the money". He said he was ready to help him provided that he agreed to divorce his daughter in advance.

Ten minutes later, Beheshteh called me to say how much

she felt sorry for Rustam "but I think", she added "he is not supposed to be helped. It is a good lesson for him that he should know his limits before he marries someone". To which I disagreed and asked Beheshteh to come in for a talk.

We had lunch together. She seemed very seductive. There was something in her big black eyes which told me she could get what she wanted. Her father had told me in the cafe' that Beheshteh had to marry "someone like you who knows so much. I am of course not suggesting that you ask for her hand after this ordeal is over. But, I very much like to have the honour to help you choose a suitable wife for yourself". To which I had answered that my wife was on her way to the United States. To which he had answered that getting a visa was almost impossible and there was a chance that she would have to return to Iran.

Yes, Beheshteh's eyes were frightening me. I pictured myself as the next Rustam. And I wondered if they had spent a night in a hotel before their tragic confrontation in the one bedroom apartment. Truly, it was worth it. It was worth to spend all what one had to have her in his arms, to feel for a few hours that she was "mine". But, one did not want to be Rustam, or worse yet, to repeat what Rustam had done.

We talked about everything including Rustam. I tried not to look into her eyes -- the very eyes which probably

were solely responsible for turning Rustam's life into ashes of sorrow.

It took me several weeks to persuade Rustam that she was not the kind of wife who could make him happy. He agreed. He also reminded me of the damages. I repeated what Beheshteh's father had told me. He asked me if I believed the father. And of course I answered "Not at all". Someone had told him that if a woman gives her mahr back to her husband in exchange for divorce, the man had to agree. I told him the parable of "donating the already wasted oil for the lamp of the mosque" and warned him: "They are too smart. They will find a way out of it. The kind of father that I saw, can even cheat God without God realizing. It is best that you nullify this marriage and go back to your normal life rather than waiting for Godot". He generously agreed and came in the next day to formally assign me as his proxy with full authority.

The family of Beheshteh never called me back. Perhaps they had somehow nullified the marriage contract even without Rustam's cont. Or perhaps, they did not care because the marriage had never been registered in an office.

REVERSE:

For the reverse of the above, consider the case of Ali and Parinaz. Here is the story:

Parinaz came to the United States with her mother a

year ago. It was in the wedding of her paternal uncle where I saw her for the first time. She is about twenty years old and larger than average for Iranian women. It was a week ago when I performed the rite of marriage between her and Ali, a forty-three year old friend of Parinaz's paternal uncle.

It was because of the age difference (25 years!) as well as some other considerations, including a long history of Ali being a playboy (not unusual for Iranian men in the U.S.) that as soon as Ali asked for the hand of Parinaz in marriage, her paternal uncle, a permanent resident in the United States, raised hell, broke up his friendship with Ali, got very mad at the wife of his brother (the mother of Parinaz) who had "cooked this undesirable soup to begin with" and did his best to break up the proposed marriage arrangement.

The uncle was unsuccessful because Ali had already managed to "steal the heart of the young girl". The bond had become stronger thanks to the enthusiasm of the "mother in-law to be" who wanted to marry her daughter off to Ali who had a steady job, a beautiful house, a good car and of course the Green Card. As a last resort, the uncle managed to postpone the marriage till his brother (the father in-law to be) arrived in the U.S. The two brothers did their best to persuade Parinaz to kick the too old "son in-law to be"

out of her life. An Arabic proverb has it that al-Insanu harisun ala ma muni' (man is eager toward whatever he is prevented from). It was indeed because -- not despite -- the strong discouragement that Ali became even more eager to possess Parinaz, who was not less enthusiastic than he. The family had no choice but submission.

It was Ali who called me to perform the wedding. Accidentally, the uncle and I arrived at the wedding at the same time. He did not look at all happy." Only a few minutes ago, did I decide to attend", he said in a sad voice. "I did not want this deal to go through", he added with gloomy face of a loser. Before I asked him any questions, the father of the bride approached us and immediately began to tease both me and his brother. I still did not know who he was and indeed, I thought he was one of the guests. "Which one of us looks younger?", he asked -- a polite and sneaky tactic of telling me that they were brothers. The father was called to go and do something when the uncle found another opportunity to tell me about his lack of pleasure with "the deal": "No one wanted this to happen. He stole the heart of this girl by showing her his house". I told him that it was a fait accomplis and it was not wise of him to appear as a loser. "Besides this", I added, "who knows? Maybe they will live happily ever after, but you will always be remembered as the party pooper -- as

the one who was an obstacle in the way". He agreed.

The wedding took place in a small room with the least possible number of people present: the bride, the groom, the parents of the bride and two women who helped in the ritual. And of course, there was the camera-man with his video-recorder. They closed the door and did not open it till everything was over. The whole "secrecy" must have had to do with the uncle. But of course, they could not exclude the uncle by himself with impunity. Therefore, the mother of the bride told me "it is our family tradition that 'others' should not be present at the ceremony". I knew that such was a strange "family tradition" designed to keep the uncle out and --because of him to keep others out so that he would have less reason to complain. Otherwise, there was no reason to invite so many people who were waiting in the living room and on the yard. They were in such a hurry for the rite to end that before I pronounced them husband and wife, the parents began giving them the gifts.

It took a long time to start the party. As I came out the room, the uncle was sitting in a corner by himself with a jealous look on his face. And then, almost everyone was curious about the age of the groom. "Is it true that he is more than twice as much old as the bride?", several people asked. And of course I knew that I was supposed to give an

answer. I merely said "does he not look as young as I am?". Indeed, he did. I literally went to everyone asking them to begin the dance. I almost pulled the uncle and his wife to the dance floor. But, after all, the party began to warm up and we all had a good time.

If I have to speculate about the future of this marriage, I must say, "it is bright". If because of nothing else, Ali will want to prove the opposite of what the uncle and others had thought of him. The uncle will perhaps serve as a safety valve of this marriage for a foreseeable future.

UNCLE CAUSES ENGAGEMENT TO BREAK

Not of course in all the cases the interference of an uncle proves to be a positive factor; it may very well not let the deal go through at all. An interesting case may be that of Ali and Traneh:

Ali, an Iranian electrical engineer from the Turkish province of Azarbayjan, who had lived in the United States most of his life, met a female Iranian student, Taraneh, originally from Kerman, who was raised in Tehran. The mothers of both had just come to visit and, perhaps, look into the possibilities of staying here forever. Both mothers were lonely and, therefore, the two decided to introduce them to each other to establish a mutual companionship. This was, however, a mere excuse. Ali liked Taraneh and wanted to date her. There was no objection and

soon the two spoke of engagement. In less than two months, Ali proposed that they should get married. Again, there was no objection and Taraneh said that mahr was not an important issue. Taraneh was relatively young (22 years old) and the matter was not totally in her hands. Ali had to go the Taraneh's mother and ask for her hand. The mother in turn was not an independent authority; she had to consult Taraneh's father who was in Iran. Yet she mentioned the amount of 1500 gold coins known in Iran as Bahar -e- Azadi (the spring of freedom) as a possible mahr. Ali, who was by then madly in love and does not dispute the financial condition, was told to hang in there and wait for a definite approval. Taraneh's father says: " Nowadays in the uncertain situation of Iran, people put four conditions forward when their daughters' hand is asked for in marriage. The bride must reserve the following rights for herself before the ceremonial 'I do': right to education, right to choice of location for residence, right to have an Occupation outside the house, and finally right to divorce her husband if she ever decides to do so". Ali did not care about any of these except the last one. The first two were indeed blessings of a sort. He had a nice house and was sure that Taraneh would love to live there. But right to divorce?! He was however convinced that the last condition merely assured Taraneh some degree of security, that she was

a rational lady and would not divorce him in the future. Meanwhile the two father-in-laws met in Iran and agreed on the financial matters. 1500 gold coins gradually dwindled into 600 only, but this was not the most important issue.

Soon, everything was prepared and I was invited to be present at a certain hour in a certain location to perform the ceremony. One day before the date, Taraneh called me to tell me that the wedding was cancelled. She was so nervous that I did not understand anything except the word "cancelled". The story of cancellation went back to the time that Taraneh and Ali go the invite the latter's uncle. From the outset it was evident that the uncle is an obstacle. He charged that Taraneh did not know her Iranian customs, that she should have come to him (who is the elder member of Ali's family and a self-proclaimed proxy of his father) earlier. While acknowledging his high status, Taraneh replied that his excellency had always been in the mainstream of the deal and he had attended the engagement ceremony. Soon, the debate leads to contrasting "the great traditions of Azarbayjan with those of Kerman" -- of course by the uncle. Ali's mother had her own "vague" grievances. After all, madar-showhar (husband's mother) is the woman whom wives have traditionally feared. Madashawhar is said to be "jealous" of her son's love affair with her daughter-in-law. Now, the two elders introduced the issue

of Ali's house. Taraneh is told that, before the marriage takes place, the house will be transferred to Ali's father. Taraneh says that she marries Ali, not the house, and she could care less. The debate became hotter and hotter, and it turned into a devastating humiliation for Taraneh. She took the engagement ring off and wanted to leave. The uncle grabbed her and apologetically asked her to stay for dinner while referring to her as "our beloved bride". As a sign of considering her a member of the family, she was even asked to help set the table, which she did.

From her house, however, Taraneh asked her brother to call Ali and say that everything was over and she no longer wished to marry him. She says that she did not like the family and could not possibly live among them.

The broken-hearted Ali, I am told, calls several times a day. He comes to visit every now and then, and he cries. He seems to have one of the two choices: to look for another wife, or, as the Persian lyric poets say, to lose everything in the "gamble of love".

TARANEH MARRIES ANOTHER MAN

A few months after Ali and Taraneh broke up for good, I was invited to an Iranian restaurant to attend the anniversary of a couple: Mahmud and Khujastah. A large table had been reserved for us, and a female Iranian singer was supposed to perform. Shortly before the singing begins,

the crowd, all Iranians, began to pour in. Not enough chairs and tables for everyone. Soon our table was filled with roses, bottles of champagne and beer, and glasses of mix drinks. I, the only non-drinker at the table of fourteen, had to settle with coke. A few jokes were cracked about marriage; some were directed at me: "How is business?", meaning of course "Have you had any weddings lately?". And there is laughter when I say "it is getting better and better everyday". The question is posed in a different way: Whose ears has recently grown"? Meaning "Who has recently got married"? (growing ears = turning into a donkey == having been fooled"). To which I say nothing. Everyone laughs. And, a married man who is sitting with his wife says to me: "How much do you charge for divorce"? His wife pulls his ears and everyone laughs again.

I see Taraneh going toward the dance floor. As she is passing our table, I give her a rose. She is wearing white, so I say to her "You look wonderful in white" -- suggesting that she makes a beautiful bride. She thanks. Ahmad, a computer engineer, who is sitting on my left says to: "Lucky son of a gun! You, a married man! In the public! Give a rose to a single girl! And admire her beauty! And nothing happens! In my city, Zanzan, one can get killed for this!". "On my city too", I say, "but the old men are exempt. She knows that I am married, that I am somewhat of a 'holy man'".

(several persons laugh), that I have no evil intentions ("who knows?", someone says -- and a few laugh") and we are fortunately in America".

Some twenty minutes later, Ahmad begins his conversation with me:

- Do you know this girl?
- I do.
- I have seen her several times. Who is she?
- A student.
- Where is she from?
- Kerman.
- (Someone who is listening): "She is like the rugs of Kerman; the more she is used, the better she gets".
- Mehdi: "But she is a brand new rug".
- Ahmad: "She is beautiful".
- Very beautiful. Do you want to marry her?
- Tonight? (laughter)
- Why not? (laughter)
- Seriously; I like to get to know her better.
- Someone: "Ask her for dance"!
- Mehdi: "It does not work. She always dances by herself".

Ahmad insists that he wants to get to know her better,

that he has a crush on her, that she is what he wants for wife. I promise to talk to her family in the proper way, and let him know. I decide to call her mother on the phone.

Shortly after midnight, I go to Taraneh's table to say "Hi" to her mom. Her mom tells me a little bit about Ali and how "things did not work". "But," I say, "the world is not going to end in a few days. Taraneh is still too young; someone else will come to marry her...". "Of course", her mother interrupts, "and she must first finish school and...". "But", I interrupt, "if a nice man knocks at her door before she finishes her school, she should consider...". "Whatever God has written for her", Taraneh's mother says. "By the way", I say, "there is this friend of mine, a computer engineer from Zanjan. He has his computer shop, and he wants to get married. I will call you in a week or so to talk more about him".

A week later I call Taraneh's house. They tell me that the two have already met, and are going out already. How is that?, I question myself after hanging up.

That night, at Taraneh's table, there was this young divorced woman, Manijeh, from Isfahan. When I describe Ahmad, she, herself curiously searching for a husband, finds out whom I am talking about. She is in fact a close friend (paramour) of Ahmad's handsome partner (who also owned part of the restaurant too). The following day, she takes

Taraneh to the shop where Taraneh "steals Ahmad's heart". A "double date is arranged": Ahmad's partner with Manijeh; Ahmad and Taraneh.

Ahmad's partner does not really know what is cooking; otherwise, as we shall see, he is opposed to Ahmad marrying Taraneh. He thinks the two just like to have some fun. They go out a few times, always the four together.

One day Ahmad calls me on the phone to tell me that he is looking for a way to tell Taraneh's family that he is in love with their daughter: " Her father is here too. I have not seen him yet. And I do not know what to do". "It is easy", I say, and promise him to talk to her parents "tonight or tomorrow night".

"Tomorrow night" I am in Taraneh's house. The father, a sixty year old man, retired from ministry of education, is very talkative. I discover that he knows the purpose of my presence there very well; but he is trying to cover things up by talking about everything except Taraneh. Finally, I open the discussion: "I have known Taraneh for some time. And there is this very good friend of mine ...". (I give him a lot of information which he already knows). He (and his wife) pretend to be listening to something quite new. He says he wants to meet Ahmad. I promise to bring him with me next time.

One night in the following week, I accompany Ahmad to

Taraneh's house. Soon, we begin talking about the wedding. Ahmad is silent. Taraneh is sitting at the dining table, pretending that she is not listening. Only the father and I are talking business -- yes "business": the amount of mahr, the justifiable conditions "which nowadays the brides impose on the grooms", the exact time of the wedding, etc. I negotiate in favor of Ahmad. We write a contract. We all sign it. Ahmad and Taraneh have a month to get ready. Since Ahmad had told me that she wants her "at any price", I added another provision to the contract: "Any party who breaks this promise must pay....". It was accepted. Ahmad and I left.

The following day, Ahmad's partner called me: "I want to see you for a few minutes". I was in the computer shop in an hour. When I arrived, their debate was already in progress :

Ahmad's partner: "I have already told Ahmad that this girl is not good for him. I know her former boyfriend. Both came to my restaurant. He had brought his bottle with him. He bought two drinks and occupied my table all the night. Finally the waiter told me about the bottle. I snatched the bottle from under his table and kicked him (and her) out of the restaurant. Now, I do not want my best friend and partner to have the leftover of charlatan as his wife. I tell him he should look for someone else".

Ahmad: "And I tell him that I like this girl, that I have already promised to marry her, that she is good enough for me, that she has already told me that her old fiance' was a charlatan (and this is why she left her), that she is exactly what I want. We are business partners, and I respect his concern, but I know he is wrong".

Ahmad's partner: "When a friend is falling into a well, I cannot simply say he is making a choice; he does not know he is falling into a well. And if I have to use force to stop him from falling, I will gladly do so regardless of what my friend may think of me. There are many Iranian girls Ahmad can marry. There are girls whom no one has ever touched. I know things about this girl that Ahmad does not even want to hear".

Mehdi: "One should not let his friend to fall into a well or a ditch. Ahmad is not a child. You have already told him about the well. But, Ahmad does not believe (I do not either) that it is a well. Or rather, it is a well to which everyone falls sooner or later. He says he likes this girl; and I think you should give him support. Alaf ooneh keh be dahan -e bozi khosh bashesh (grass is anything that may appeal to the appetite of the goat". Certainly, I know nothing bad about Taraneh. You do not either. Why do you like to bluff in order to change his mind?"

Ahmad's partner: "I do not bluff. I bet you that the

goat is going to get indigestion from eating this grass! A hungry goat may even eat paper and plastics. I should perhaps introduce the goat into some real grass -- some free grass which he does not have to eat for the rest of his life. He just needs to get into the pants of a pretty girl. He is horny. That is all".

Mehdi: "Excuse me for having said the parable of "grass". Women are not grass, nor are men goats. And Ahmad is old enough and wise enough to know that getting married is much more serious tthan getting into a pair of pretty pants. He still has some time to think about it and make the best possible decision."

Ahmad: "I have already made a decision."

Ahmad's partner: "Then, do not expect me to be at the wedding. I will have nothing to do with it."

Mehdi: "That is not right. If your best friend and partner invites you to his wedding (and I am sure he will), then you have to come. And, after all, who is going to be 'best man'? If I were in your shoes, I would play "leader" in this situation and get my friend married to his favorite girl."

Ahmad's partner: "My restaurant is at his service. But this does not mean that I approve of this marriage. I guarantee you that it will not last very long. Ahmad must promise that he will never bring his marriage problems to me

and ask for solution."

A week before the wedding is supposed to take place, I receive a call from Taraneh: "Wedding cancelled. Although I like Ahmad a great deal, he is too old for me." "You could have told him the very night that we wrote the contract. Was not his birthdate (and yours) written there?" "Yes, but we had to think about it. Now I know that I do not want to marry him." "Have you told him this?" "No, I do not know how to tell him."

I call Ahmad: "May be it is best. Let us forget about this marriage. There is very little you can do about your age". Ahmad pretends to be persuaded: "Alright. So be it. If God does not want something to happen, He arranges everything: Your best friend tries to stop it, your girlfriend stops it and...".

Three days before the wedding date, Ahmad calls me to remind me that the wedding is going to take place: "We worked everything out."

The wedding was supposed to take place on a Saturday, five in the afternoon. It is already seven but Ahmad's partner is not around. I am waiting for him to show up. Finally, I call his restaurant:

- "We are all waiting for you."
- "I am too busy."
- "Too busy for your best friend's wedding?"

- "Do it without me. I am short of help here."
- "Shall I come and pick you up?"
- "No, I cannot come."

The bride and the groom are already on their seats. So I begin the ceremony. The small apartment is filled with the smoke of esfand (wild rue), which Iranians burn against the evil eyes and spirits. As I am speaking "for better or worse, richer or poorer...", the smoke alarm screams and irritates everyone. Someone finally shuts it off. After "I do's", gifts are given and everyone leaves to see each other again in the restaurant for reception.

All is well with Ahmad and Taraneh's married life. But, Ahmad's partner still wants to prove his point. Week after week, he complains about Ahmad coming to work too late and taking off too early; that he is always half-asleep, tired and absentminded. I try to persuade him that it will change with time: "They are newly wed. They need to spend more time together." But to no avail. Three months later, Ahmad quits his job.

THE CASE OF AN INCOMPLETE DIVORCE:

Venus (in her mid-twenties) and Jamal (in his early thirties) married a little over a year ago, and now I receive a call from Venus that she wants divorce from her husband. "Do you remember us at all?", is her first question, and she is surprised to know that I remember the

whole ceremony in which I had played a part. In fact, hers was somewhat of a special case because, before accepting to go to her wedding, I had asked her whether I could take a friend with me. "Of course", she had said, and I had taken Stella Gregorian (a graduate student of anthropology) who wanted to see an Iranian Muslim wedding. I remembered the details because I had somewhat explained the procedure to Stella, and Stella had brought her camera to capture some of the moments. I still have one of the photos: I am sitting at a table on which there are two cups of black coffee, writing the marriage agreement.

"It was wrong; it was totally wrong to marry this guy" is the first explanation Venus gives me. At first, I did not take the matter very seriously. I thought of it as one of those periodic problems in some new marriage... "I must talk to both of you and see what the problems are", I tell her in an authoritative voice. "One should not think of divorce as soon as a difficulty comes up in life", I continued. She tells me that the matters are gone beyond a simple problem, and divorce is inevitable. "But", I reply, "without your husband, you cannot do anything unless..." Before I finish the sentence, she says that she already knows the "unless" and her husband is going to be present when we discuss the matters. "I will be waiting for your call" is the end I put to the telephone conversation, but I

remember that, if she calls my house, she must be discouraged from telling my wife about divorce: My wife does not want me to get involved in two social issues: Death and Divorce. I tell Venus not to leave any message with my wife except a name and a telephone number.

I am in my office when Venus calls a week later. Her voice is trembling. She gives an address, and she adds that "it is the house of a friend -- a mutual friend who cares for both sides and both sides trust him. Be there 3:00 p.m. Saturday. I need you badly".

The house of the friend is a one-bedroom apartment. It is packed with a large TV, a large and sophisticated stereo, and the furniture pieces which look too large for a small apartment. As I enter, every one stands up: Venus, Jamal, Venus's brother, the wife of Venus's brother (and their few months old baby), the resident of the house, his wife (and their two year old baby), and two male friends (which probably had been brought as witnesses of the case). I do not yet know how to begin. We crack a few jokes -- all about marriage. None of the jokes prove to be a good means of transition to the tragedy of divorce. After a few minutes, Venus and Jamal leave for the only bedroom. Several thoughts came to my mind, and I wished that the atmosphere of the bedroom would somehow make them change their minds. When they finally came out, they seemed as

indifferent toward one another as they had seemed since my arrival. Jamal's curious looks gave me the necessary courage to ask him to go outside with me for a talk, and he eagerly followed me.

What's the matter", was my first question which triggered a long monologue: "Our marriage has not been a happy one. The last thing I want to do in my life is to hurt Venus because she has been good to me, but I have always liked her in a sort of different way -- just the way one loves his sisters. I am not gay (homosexual); in-fact I am quite normal. But I do not have any sexual feeling toward Venus. First time I went out with her, she asked me why I was taking her out; and I said that I had missed my four sisters and I wanted to be in the company of someone who would remind me of my sisters. But, things changed gradually, and before I could realize, I had already gone too far. She had not taken my first comment seriously, and she had always thought of me as a potential husband. Soon, her parents came to the United States, and she asked me for an engagement ring. I gave her one because I did not want to have to explain the situation to her parents (who would not probably believe me anyway). Her mother soon asked me to give an exact date for wedding. That, I did not like at all, and I tried to avoid the same type of request. But it was not possible to go on like this for a long time. "Six

months from today", was my response to her mother. I hoped that the parents would leave the United States within a few months, and I would be able to break my promise. They did not leave, and I psyched myself up for the inevitable wedding. In fact, I grew to think about the wedding positively: Venus was attractive, educated, lovable, and she came from a good family and had a nice job. I gradually changed my feeling toward her and began to like her as a potential wife. At the moment of "I do", I was sure that what I was doing was completely right. The first three months, we were doing O.K., but damn the economy! Things began to work in the wrong direction, I lost a lot of investment, and I decided to move to another part of the world in search of my fortune. We began to have disagreements. We began to go deeper and deeper in debt, and our sex life went down the drain because I lost interest in her. Now, I want to divorce her because I do not want to hurt her more than I already have."

" So, you argue that there was some pressure involved: I mean first the pressure of her parents and then the pressure of economy?", I said in order to encourage him to speak more about the situation.

"-Yes, she and her parents forced me into what I was not ready for. And then the financial situation brought the marriage down and I found out that I won't be able to make

her happy."

- "But you understand that it was you also who made the decision by forcing yourself into something that you were not supposedly ready for. Now, let me be frank with you. I hope you do not think that I am a shameless person. Suppose it is your older brother who is talking to you. If the economic situation gets well all of a sudden -- let us say by a miracle --, do you think you will have amorous feelings toward Venus."

- "Not at all. I have never been attracted to her in that way. I told you this already..."

- "How about her?"

- "She feels what a wife would, you know, she has always been sexually interested in me. But I cannot see myself sleeping with her. For the past nine months, I have been sleeping on the couch. She does not turn me on."

- "Let me bring in another issue. You tell me if it is relevant or not. We guys have the advantage of having sexual experience before marriage. We may even have extra-marital sex while we are married. And this is thanks to some American girls (and some Iranian women too) who so generously spread their legs after a few drinks and a dinner, and let us have fun. They know how please us because they have learned the art by having slept with many men. The art of sex grows with experience, and therefore an

experienced man like many of our compatriots can no longer appreciate the virgin girls who are just beginning to be "freshmen of sex." If this is the case, let me tell you that much of the blame is upon your shoulder because you are not a good teacher. If the wife does not do things that a man loves, the husband must tell her. He must teach her. Then, I bet you she will be an ideal sex-partner. How do you expect a virgin girl to know how to turn you on?."

- "No, this has nothing to do with our case. The feeling is not there."

- "But it was there, for instance when you went to honeymoon, or the first time when you kissed her."

- "It is not there now, and I cannot fake it."

- "But there is more to marriage than sex. Suggestion does a lot of the job. And you tell me that, shortly before the marriage, you developed love for her by suggestion. Last but not least, divorce is not going to help your cause because it is you who must pay her what you have promised her before anyone can do anything. I hope you are not going to tell me that you just want to leave her without paying what is rightly hers."

- "Not at all. In fact I will give her everything I promised her."

- "Be truthful! You told me that you are in financial troubles. How are you going to do that unless there is a

rich girlfriend who is going to help you out?"

- " Believe me there is nobody. But I will keep my promises."

- "I hope you will keep them better than your promise of "I do". Now, I must talk to her too. All what we talked about is between you and I: it is nobody else's business."

We come back to the apartment. I ask Venus to follow me outside. She does. "What is the matter", I ask her, and she appears not to have a ready monologue. "What do you want to know?" She replies. "All what you have to say", I tell her. "It is your marriage; it is your life. Anything which you might think will help me help you."

- "Well, for one thing, this gentleman said such a loud "I do" that, if you remember, all the witnesses laughed. One of my friends in fact asked him loudly why he had said it so loudly. And he said because he had no doubt about what he was doing. He promised me a new model of Mercedes Benz as marriage settlement. And you know that I had not asked for anything. All what I wanted him to do was to be my husband."

- "Who initiated the idea of marriage? Was it you, he or someone else?"

- "Does it sound logical to you that an Iranian girl like me would have asked a man to marry her? And, why would someone else rather than him initiate the talk about

marriage? We went out at the beginning. Then the relationship boiled down to thinking about marriage."

- "So, there was no pressure or encouragement from anybody else. And he was the first person to suggest marriage. Is that what you want to say?"

- "Precisely. All my mother requested -- and I think she had the right to request -- is that he should give a precise date for the wedding. My mother wanted to try to stay here for the wedding. And he kept her waiting. Six month was a long time that my mother had to wait. But she did. You know, I am an independent person. I was not a girl who looks for a husband in search of financial support. I had already lived in France, and my education was good enough to provide me a job. When I married him I had a good job. I was director of a medical lab, with good salary. After marrying him, I lost the job because he preferred a housewife to a professional woman. It was as though he would love me more if I stayed home, cooked his meals, washed and ironed his clothes, and what have you. I did all these because I wanted him to be happy. I warned him a few times about big financial risks. But he did not listen to me. Now, everything has gone down the drain. When I finally left his house at his request, I asked him whether it was what he wanted. He said it was. I repeated the question three times. He gave the same answer. So I left.

And now I have a good job again, but he has no job. Just because he is an architect, he thinks that he must only find a job as an architect. In this bad economic situation, there are many Ph.D.s who may have to work as waiters and what have you. One must earn a living and take responsibility. He does not want to do that."

- "Have you been able to help him financially?"

- "Are you kidding? It is I who is currently paying the credit card loans with 19% interest. He has no money. All my life, I have never had debts. Now, debt is all that I have. I am ready to save my marriage if he treats me like a wife."

- "If you do not mind, how is your love life?"

- "I guess you should know. The first three months, it was O.K. Then he began to sleep on the couch, and did not let me touch him. He did not want to have anything to do with me."

- "Why?"

- "He must have told you."

- "You tell me your side; never mind what he and I have discussed. So you think there is another woman involved?"

- "I do not know. I do not think so. All what I know that he does not want me to touch him. You are a married man yourself and you know that life cannot go on like this forever. I did not want a room-mate who borrows money from

my account; I wanted to have a husband, and I do not."

- "I believe that his sexual impotency has much to do with the economic situation."

- "Perhaps. He asked me to work as a waitress and bring money home while he recovers from the financial loss and finds a job."

- "And what did you do?"

- "Why should I work as a waitress. I can have better jobs. But he does not want that. It is as though he can only admire a wife who is somewhat lower in status. If I am the one who brings money home, it is I who should run the show. But, he cannot understand this."

- "How was your honey-moon?"

- "As I found out later, it could have been a lot better. It was not normal. I think he had a change of heart as soon as he found out that it is a responsibility to be married. He discovered that marriage is more than having an extra piece of furniture in the house. So, the first three months was the period of gradual decrease. After three months, everything stopped."

- "When was the last time that you two slept together?"

- "Nine months ago. And I know that there is nothing wrong with me. I am a beautiful and attractive woman. If I stand among ten average Iranian women in front of a bunch of men, I will be the choice. What is wrong is his attitude."

And no one seems to be able to change that. So, I want to get divorce."

- "If there is nothing else, let us go back to the apartment."

In fact, when we walked toward the apartment, the folks were waiting impatiently. One of the "witnesses" was standing in anticipation outside the apartment. As soon as I walked in, I said:

"Considering all that I heard, no final decision can be made today. I think the problem is a temporary one, and both sides must try -- like any other couple at the beginning of their married life -- to challenge the problem and solve it. I got married when I was sixteen. And goodness knows how many problems -- much larger than this -- we have had. At the present, my wife and I look back to those days and laugh at the problems which, if we had used our courage and determination, would have terminated our marriage. It is always easy to escape from the battlefield, but God has given us courage to stay in the field and push the problems outside our lives. If you still insist on escape, I reserve the freedom for myself to call both of you "cowards". And I know which one of you is more coward, but I am not going to say. I recommend that you two move in with the intention of helping each other, trying to understand each other, trying to reconstruct the valuable

bond which is between you. Call me after thirty days."

At this point, Jamal said that a month would not change anything: "Let us finish it today."

- "Finish what? It is not as easy as you think. It was so easy for both of you to say "I do". That is why you think it is equally easy to say "I do not". What we have here is a breach of promise; perhaps the most important promise one gives in his or her life. And, there are a lot of financial issues which must be resolved."

Jamal: "I told you that I am ready. We are not made for each other."

Mehdi: "Can I have a piece of paper?" I give the pad to Jamal and ask him to write me a power of attorney if he wants me to handle the case. He does. I do the same thing with Venus. Both give me "complete authority". Everyone signs.

The most surprising thing to me was the silence of Venus's brother. I already knew that he had been advised to keep silent and swallow his anger. A few times he attempted to say something (in a very polite voice), but, by sign language, I encouraged him to keep him silent. I continued with Jamal :

- "Alright! You promised this man a Mercedes Benz. Where is it?"

Jamal: "I will give it to her"

Wife of Venus's brother: "Forget the Mercedes Benz; this gentleman must pay other expenses first. The credit cards."

Mehdi: "Please wait! Who is trying to solve the problem? If it is I, then things must be handled one by one. First, I want to know where the car is."

Wife of Venus's brother: "But the bills come first".

Mehdi: "It makes no difference. If you prefer, how are going to pay the bills? But, I still insist that the car is an unquestionable part of the settlement unless Venus prefers not to have it. I want the whole thing in writing."

Venus's brother: "What difference does it make. This gentleman who is so proud of his homeland and brags that he is a man from Tawalish -- and I guess everyone should be proud of where he comes from -- promised my sister both orally and on the paper that he would be a good husband for her. Now you see the results."

Jamal: "I am damn proud of Tawalish and my heritage. The people of Tawalish keep their promises".

Venus's brother: "I can see that."

Jamal: "We invited Mr. Abedi to solve the problem. We should let him handle it. If there is something I must pay, I will pay."

Mehdi: "Yes there is. I mean there are. And I want everything in writing with the signature of the witnesses."

Jamal: "The car."

Mehdi: "Yes, when do you think it is ready for delivery?"

Jamal (with the pad in his hand, after a long pause):
"In seven years. Is that O.K.? This is the best I can do. You know \$50,000 is a lot of money."

Venus's brother: "Mr. Abedi! If the parents of Jamal -- who incidentally disagree very much with the shame that their son is bringing upon the family -- agree to pay the whole thing..."

Jamal interrupts: "I will not let anyone, particularly my parents, pay my bills. Especially that it is wartime and they cannot afford it easily. I made the mistake and I am responsible for the "fine" -- the "fine" for having said an "I do". We are not from the jungle, and do not go with its rules."

Venus takes Jamal out for a talk. They return after a few minutes. But, before their return, Venus's brother turns to the witness who had come on behalf of Jamal, saying:

"You see how calmly I am sitting here? Suppose that someone had done this to your sister. What would you do"?

Witness: "Me? Despite the fact the Jamal is my best friend, I must say that I would break his face and kill him, no matter what. I really appreciate that you are sitting

there so gently. I am really amazed. But, let me tell you that he is a man of his promises. He wants to pay his bills. Otherwise, he does not have to put up with this headache. After all, the marriage is not registered in the government offices. He does not have to consider it important, but you see that he does."

Mehdi: "What did you say? Just because the marriage is not registered, he cannot consider it null and void. After all, not only have they lived together for a year -- and this means a legal common law marriage --, there were witnesses on the case. I am with this deal to the end of the line. The real law is the human law. As the Persian saying has it, those who go to the weddings must go to the funerals as well. Jamal is under obligation as far as I am concerned."

Venus and Jamal return. Venus says:

- "He will write that he will pay me \$3,500 in three months, and another \$3,500 in the following three months. Plus interest, of course. And, I do not care about the car. He can give it to me in seven years."

Jamal writes two promise letters, one for the car and one for the money. Everyone signs them. The wife of the friend (the resident) turns to Jamal saying: "You may think these are only papers. Not at all! They are going to be notarized. You cannot break your promise once again." I

did not know on which side she was: Her statement could very well be a warning to Jamal: "Get them back and tear them to pieces." It could also mean "this time is not like the last time. My signature is there, and I will press for its contents."

Venus goes to her purse and brings a small card. She gives it to Jamal: "Who gave this to me. Who wrote me this love note?", she asks. Jamal takes the card, reads it, and tears it apart. He puts the pieces in his own pocket: "Is that all what you have from me? Now you even do not have that. To hell with everything".

Venus's brother stands up in front of Jamal: "So, you say that you are not from the jungle and have rules of your own. I come from the jungle and I am damn proud of it. I am a jangali, and the jangalis keep their promises. Just look at you! Ask your own friend if you want to know who the real gentleman is. Money and car is not important. My sister did not marry you for money or your car. She wanted and a husband which you are not. Any other brother would have smashed you for what you have done. All what was important was her life. And truly, her life is very important. And thank God she is better off right now than she was in your house. She has a job. What do you have?"

I was just beginning to realize that I had missed a point in the argument: Jamal was from the mountains of

Tawalish, and by refering to jungle (forest), he had suggested that Venus and his brother (who were from Rasht) were of a lower regional status. That has fueled the anger of Venus's brother.

Jamal did not seem to have anything to say. But there was the danger of a fight. While I tried to keep them apart from each other, Venus jumped in the middle and cried: "For God's sake! Stop it! It is my life, not yours." She was very loud. The resident of the house jumped in saying with a trembling voice: "In my house? You want to do this in my house? I did you a favour by letting you bring your problem inside my house because I thought you wanted to solve it."

Both sides became silent once again. Venus's brother went to the kitchen. Jamal's friend followed him. We were offered some hot tea. All sat down once again. I drank my tea in hurry. I wanted to get out of there, but more importantly, I was no position to solve the problem one way or the other. All the paper work was in my hand. So, I used my power:

"Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. But, nothing can be accomplished today. As soon as Venus informs me that she has received the first \$3,500, I will announce my decision. Until then, good bye and good luck". I got up, kissed all the males good bye, waved my hand goodbye to the females and left the apartment. (Before departure I

suddenly realized that Venus was no longer present. "She is in bed," someone said, "she is not feeling well. She will talk to you later.")

It was the best thing to do for several reasons:

1- If I wanted to read the formula of divorce, not only did I need two "just witnesses" (and one of the present would qualify), I had to ask Venus whether she was ritually clean from her menstruation cycle. One cannot divorce a woman when she is having her period. It was not possible for me to ask her in front of others, and if I asked her to tell me outside, the danger of a fight breaking would be increased.

2- If Jamal had the courage of signing under the divorce agreement (he was trembling with nervousness because he knew he was guilty), I am sure Venus's brother would get out of control and we had to deal with a fight -- possibly outside the apartment.

3- My fear was in fact not for the possible fight, but for a higher probability of breach of promise on the part of Jamal. I did not want him to have it too easy as to encourage him make "easy marriage and easy divorce" a habit of his. In fact, I had a feeling that he had come in for an easy deal. I wanted him to be disappointed. I wanted to make the divorce paper a collateral for \$3,500 -- to say the least.

It is no wonder that Venus's brother (and his wife) said good bye to me with a sad smile of approval. Between a divorce (plus the car and plus the money) and saving of Venus's marriage, they both preferred the latter, and others (except Jamal) had the same feeling. Jamal's friend followed me outside and shoved a \$20 bill into my pocket. I wanted to refuse it but then I decided to keep it as another evidence of the Jamal's possible attitude: You may pay a man fifty bucks to make the marriage; you give the same man twenty bucks to nullify it.

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